tribal groups. Caste in India means an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy. Thus the conclusion is inevitable that *Endogamy is the only characteristic that is peculiar to caste,* and if we succeed in showing how endogamy is maintained, we shall practically have proved the genesis and also the mechanism of Caste.

It may not be quite easy for you to anticipate why I regard endogamy as a key to the mystery of the Caste system. Not to strain your imagination too much, I will proceed to give you my reasons for it.

It may not also be out of place to emphasize at this moment that no civilized society of today presents more survivals of primitive times than does the Indian society. Its religion is essentially primitive and its tribal code, in spite of the advance of time and civilization, operates in all its pristine vigour even today. One of these primitive survivals, to which I wish particularly to draw your attention is the *Custom of Exogamy*. The prevalence of exogamy in the primitive worlds is a fact too wellknown to need any explanation. With the growth of history, however, exogamy has lost its efficacy, and excepting the nearest blood-kins, there is usually no social bar restricting the field of marriage. But regarding the peoples of India the law of exogamy is a positive injunction even today. Indian society still savours of the clan system, even though there are no clans ; and this can be easily seen from the law of matrimony which centres round the principle of exogamy, for it is not that *Sapindas* (blood-kins) cannot marry, but a marriage even between *Sagotras* (of the same class) is regarded as a sacrilege.

Nothing is therefore more important for you to remember than the fact that endogamy is foreign to the people of India. The various *Gotras* of India are and have been exogamous : so are the other groups with totemic organization. It is no exaggeration to say that with the people of India exogamy is a creed and none dare infringe it, so much so that, in spite of the endogamy of the Castes within them, exogamy is strictly observed and that there are more rigorous penalties for violating exogamy than there are for violating endogamy. You will, therefore, readily see that with exogamy as the rule there could be no Caste, for exogamy means fusion. But we have castes ; consequently in the final analysis creation of Castes, so far as India is concerned, means the superposition of endogamy on exogamy. However, in an originally exogamous population an easy working out of endogamy (which is equivalent to the creation of Caste) is a grave problem, and it is in the consideration of the means utilized for the preservation of endogamy against exogamy that we may hope to find the solution of our problem.

Thus the superposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste. But this is not an easy affair. Let us take an imaginary group that desires to make itself into a Caste and analyse what means it will have to adopt to

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make itself endogamous. If a group desires to make itself endogamous a formal injunction against intermarriage with outside groups will be of no avail, especially if prior to the introduction of endogamy, exogamy had been the rule in all matrimonial relations. Again, there is a tendency in all groups lying in close contact with one another to assimilate and amalgamate, and thus consolidate into a homogeneous society. If this tendency is to be strongly counteracted in the interest of Caste formation, it is absolutely necessary to circumscribe a circle outside which people should not contract marriages.

Nevertheless, this encircling to prevent marriages from without creates problems from within which are not very easy of solution. Roughly speaking, in a normal group the two sexes are more or less evenly distributed, and generally speaking there is an equality between those of the same age. The equality is, however, never quite realized in actual societies. At the same time to the group that is desirous of making itself into a caste the maintenance of equality between the sexes becomes the ultimate goal, for without it. endogamy can no longer subsist. In other words, if endogamy is to be preserved conjugal rights from within have to be provided for, otherwise members of the group will be driven out of the circle to take care of themselves in any way they can. But in order that the conjugal rights be provided for from within, it is absolutely necessary to maintain a numerical equality between the marriageable units of the two sexes within the group desirous of making itself into a Caste. It is only through the maintenance of such an equality that the necessary endogamy of the group can be kept intact, and a very large disparity is sure to break it.

The problem of Caste, then, ultimately resolves itself into one of repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it. Left to nature, the much needed parity between the units can be realized only when a couple dies simultaneously. But this is a rare contingency. The husband may die before the wife and create a *surplus woman,* who must be disposed of, else through intermarriage she will violate the endogamy of the group. In like manner the husband may survive his wife and be *surplus man,* whom the group, while it may sympathise with him for the sad bereavement, has to dispose of, else he will marry outside the Caste and will break the endogamy. Thus both the *surplus man* and the *surplus woman* constitute a menace to the Caste if not taken care of, for not finding suitable partners inside their prescribed circle (and left to themselves they cannot find any, for if the matter be not regulated there can only be just enough pairs to go round) very likely they will transgress the boundary, marry outside and import offspring that is foreign to the Caste.

Let us see what our imaginary group is likely to do with this *surplus man* and *surplus woman.* We will first take up the case of the *surplus woman.*

She can be disposed of in two different ways so as to preserve the endogamy of the Caste.

First: burn her on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband and get rid of her. This, however, is rather an impracticable way of solving the problem of sex disparity. In some cases it may work, in others it may not. Consequently every surplus woman cannot thus be disposed of, because it is an easy solution but a hard realization. And so the *surplus woman* (= widow), if not disposed of, remains in the group : but in her very existence lies a double danger. She may marry outside the Caste and violate endogamy, or she may marry within the Caste and through competition encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brides in the Caste. She is therefore a menance in any case, and something must be done to her if she cannot be burned along with her deceased husband.

The second remedy is to enforce widowhood on her for the rest of her life. So far as the objective results are concerned, burning is a better solution than enforcing widowhood. Burning the widow eliminates all the three evils that a *surplus woman* is fraught with. Being dead and gone she creates no problem of remarriage either inside or outside the Caste. But compulsory widowhood is superior to burning because it is more practicable. Besides being comparatively humane it also guards against the evils of remarriage as does burning; but it fails to guard the morals of the group. No doubt under compulsory widowhood the woman remains, and just because she is deprived of her natural right of being a legitimate wife in future, the incentive to immoral conduct is increased. But this is by no means an insuperable difficulty. She can be degraded to a condition in which she is no longer a source of allurement.

The problem of *surplus man* (= widower) is much more important and much more difficult than that of the *surplus woman* in a group that desires to make itself into a Caste. From time immemorial man as compared with woman has had the upper hand. He is a dominant figure in every group and of the two sexes has greater prestige. With this traditional superiority of man over woman his wishes have always been consulted. Woman, on the other hand, has been an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions, religious, social or economic. But man as a maker of injunctions is most often above them all. Such being the case, you cannot accord the same kind of treatment to a *surplus man* as you can to a *surplus woman* in a Caste.

The project of burning him with his deceased wife is hazardous in two ways : first of all it cannot be done, simply because he is a man. Secondly, if done, a sturdy soul is lost to the Caste. There remain then only two solutions which can conveniently dispose of him. I say conveniently, because he is an asset to the group.

Important as he is to the group, endogamy is still more important, and the solution must assure both these ends. Under these circumstances he may be forced or I should say induced, after the manner of the widow, to remain a widower for the rest of his life. This solution is not altogether difficult, for without any compulsion some are so disposed as to enjoy self-imposed celibacy, or even to take a further step of their own accord and renounce the world and its joys. But, given human nature as it is, this solution can hardly be expected to be realized. On the other hand, as is very likely to be the case, if the *surplus man* remains in the group as an active participator in group activities, he is a danger to the morals of the group. Looked at from a different point of view celibacy, though easy in cases where it succeeds, is not so advantageous even then to the material prospects of the Caste. If he observes genuine celibacy and renounces the world, he would not be a menace to the preservation of Caste endogamy or Caste morals as he undoubtedly would be if he remained a secular person. But as an ascetic celibate he is as good as burned, so far as the material well-being of his Caste is concerned. A Caste, in order that it may be large enough to afford a vigorous communal life, must be maintained at a certain numerical strength. But to hope for this and to proclaim celibacy is the same as trying to cure atrophy by bleeding.

Imposing celibacy on the *surplus man* in the group, therefore, fails both theoretically and practically. It is in the interest of the Caste to keep him as a *Grahastha* (one who raises a family), to use a Sanskrit technical term. But the problem is to provide him with a wife from within the Caste. At the outset this is not possible, for the ruling ratio in a caste has to be one man to one woman and none can have two chances of marriage, for in a Caste thoroughly self-enclosed there are always just enough marriageable women to go round for the marriageable men. Under these circumstances the *surplus man* can be provided with a wife only by recruiting a bride from the ranks of those not yet marriageable in order to tie him down to the group. This is certainly the best of the possible solutions in the case of the *surplus man*. By this, he is kept within the Caste. By this means numerical depletion through constant outflow is guarded against, and by this endogamy morals are preserved.

It will now be seen that the four means by which numerical disparity between the two sexes is conveniently maintained are : (1) burning the widow with her deceased husband ; (2) compulsory widowhood—a milder form of burning ; (3) imposing celibacy on the widower and (4) wedding him to a girl not yet marriageable. Though, as I said above, burning the widow and imposing celibacy on the widower are of doubtful service to the group in its endeavour to preserve its endogamy, all of them operate as *means*. But means, as forces, when liberated or set in motion create an end. What then is the end that these means create ? They create and perpetuate endogamy, while caste and

endogamy, according to our analysis of the various definitions of caste, are one and the same thing. Thus the existence of these means is identical with caste and caste involves these means.

This, in my opinion, is the general mechanism of a caste in a system of castes. Let us now turn from these high generalities to the castes in Hindu Society and inquire into their mechanism. I need hardly premise that there are a great many pitfalls in the path of those who try to unfold the past, and caste in India to be sure is a very ancient institution. This is especially true where there exist no authentic or written records or where the people, like the Hindus, are so constituted that to them writing history is a folly, for the world is an illusion. But institutions do live, though for a long time they may remain unrecorded and as often as not customs and morals are like fossils that tell their own history. If this is true, our task will be amply rewarded if we scrutinize the solution the Hindus arrived at to meet the problems of the *surplus man* and *surplus woman*.

Complex though it be in its general working the Hindu Society, even to a superficial observer, presents three singular uxorial customs, namely :

(i) *Sati* or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband.

(ii) Enforced widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to remarry.

(iii) Girl marriage.

In addition, one also notes a great hankering after *Sannyasa* (renunciation) on the part of the widower, but this may in some cases be due purely to psychic disposition.

So far as I know, no scientific explanation of the origin of these customs is forthcoming even today. We have plenty of philosophy to tell us why these customs were honoured, but nothing to tell us the causes of their origin and existence. *Sati* has been honoured (C*f.* A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Sati:* A Defence of the Eastern Woman in the British Sociological Review, Vol. VI, 1913) because it is a "proof of the perfect unity of body and soul" between husband and wife and of "devotion beyond the grave", because it embodied the ideal of wifehood, which is well expressed by Uma when she said, "Devotion to her Lord is woman's honour, it is her eternal heaven : and O Maheshvara", she adds with a most touching human cry, "I desire not paradise itself if thou are not satisfied with me !" Why compulsory widowhood is honoured I know not, nor have I yet met with any one who sang in praise of it, though there are a great many who adhere to it. The eulogy in honour of girl marriage is reported by Dr. Ketkar to be as follows : "A really faithful man or woman ought not to feel affection for a woman or a man other than the one with whom he or she is united. Such purity is compulsory not only after marriage, but even before marriage, for that is the only correct ideal of chastity. No maiden could be considered pure if she feels love for a man other than the one

to whom she might be married. As she does not know to whom she is going to be married, she must not feel affection for any man at all before marriage. If she does so, it is a sin. So it is better for a girl to know whom she has to love before any sexual consciousness has been awakened in her."[2] Hence girl marriage.

This high-flown and ingenious sophistry indicates why these institutions were honoured, but does not tell us why they were practised. My own interpretation is that they were honoured because they were practised. Any one slightly acquainted with rise of individualism in the 18th century will appreciate my remark. At all times, it is the movement that is most important; and the philosophies grow around it long afterwards to justify it and give it a moral support. In like manner I urge that the very fact that these customs were so highly eulogized proves that they needed eulogy for their prevalence. Regarding the question as to why they arose, I submit that they were needed to create the structure of caste and the philosophies in honour of them were intended to popularize them, or to gild the pill, as we might say, for they must have been so abominable and shocking to the moral sense of the unsophisticated that they needed a great deal of sweetening. These customs are essentially of the nature of *means,* though they are represented as ideals. But this should not blind us from understanding the *results* that flow from them. One might safely say that idealization of means is necessary and in this particular case was perhaps motivated to endow them with greater efficacy. Calling a means an end does no harm, except that it disguises its real character ; but it does not deprive it of its real nature, that of a means. You may pass a law that all cats are dogs, just as you can call a means an end. But you can no more change the nature of means thereby than you can turn cats into dogs; consequently I am justified in holding that, whether regarded as ends or as means, *Sati, enforced widowhood* and *girl marriage* are customs that were primarily intended to solve the problem of the *surplus man* and *surplus woman* in a caste and to maintain its endogamy. Strict endogamy could not be preserved without these customs, while caste without endogamy is a fake.

Having explained the mechanism of the creation and preservation of Caste in India, the further question as to its genesis naturally arises. The question or origin is always an annoying question and in the study of Caste it is sadly neglected ; some have connived at it, while others have dodged it. Some are puzzled as to whether there could be such a thing as the origin of caste and suggest that "if we cannot control our fondness for the word 'origin', we should better use the plural form, viz. 'origins of caste' ". As for myself I do not feel puzzled by the Origin of Caste in India for, as I have established before, endogamy is the only characteristic of Caste and when I say *Origin of Caste* I mean *The Origin of the Mechanism for Endogamy.*

2. *History of Caste in India,* 1909, pp. 2-33.

CHAPTER 17

The Woman and the Counter-Revolution

There is one copy with a title 'The Woman and the Counter-Revolution'. There is another copy of the same text with a title, 'The Riddle of the Woman'. The Editorial Board felt that this essay would be appropriate in this Volume rather than in the volume of 'Riddles in Hinduism' .—Editors.

Manu can hardly be said to be more tender to women than he was to the Shudra. He starts with a low opinion of women. Manu proclaims:

II. 213. It is the nature of women to seduce men in this (world); for that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.

II. 214. For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger.

II. 215. One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister or daughter; for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man.

IX. 14. Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; (thinking); '(It is enough that) he is a man', they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.

IX. 15. Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however, carefully they may be guarded in this (world).

IX. 16. Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid in them at the creation, to be such, (every) man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

IX. 17. (When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) bed, (of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct.

The laws of Manu against women are of a piece with this view. Women are not to be free under any circumstances. In the opinion of Manu:

IX. 2. Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of their families), and, if they attach themselves to sexual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control.

IX. 3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.

IX. 5. Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); for, if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families.

IX. 6. Considering that the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives.

IV. 147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

V. 148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

V. 149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible.

Woman is not to have a right to divorce.

IX. 45. The husband is declared to be one with the wife, which means that there could be no separation once a woman is married.

Many Hindus stop here as though this is the whole story regarding Manu's law of divorce and keep on idolizing it by comforting their conscience by holding out the view that Manu regarded marriage as sacrament and therefore, did not allow divorce. This of course is far from the truth. His law against divorce had a very different motive. It was not to tie up a man to a woman but it was to tie up the woman to a man and to leave the man free.

For Manu does not prevent a man from giving up his wife. Indeed he not only allows him to abandon his wife but he also permits him to sell her. But what he does is to prevent the wife from becoming free. See what Manu says:

IX. 46. Neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband.

The meaning is that a wife, sold or repudiated by her husband, can never become the legitimate wife of another who may have bought or received her after she was repudiated. If this is not monstrous nothing can be. But Manu was not worried by consideration of justice or injustice of his law. He wanted to deprive woman of the freedom she had under the Buddhistic regime. He knew that by her misuse of her liberty, by her willingness to marry the Shudra the system of the

gradation of the Varna had been destroyed. Manu was outraged by her license and in putting a stop to it he deprived her of her liberty.

A wife was reduced by manu to the level of a slave in the matter of property.

> IX. 416. A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong.

When she becomes a widow Manu allows her maintenance, if her husband was joint, and a widow's estate in the property of her husband, if he was separate from his family. But Manu never allows her to have any dominion over property.

A woman under the laws of Manu is subject to corporal punishment and Manu allows the husband the right to beat his wife.

> VIII. 299. A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil and a younger brother of full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo. In other matters woman was reduced by Manu to the same position as the Shudra.

The study of the Veda was forbidden to her by Manu as it was to the Shudra.

> II. 66. Even for a woman the performance of the *Sanskaras* are necessary and they should be performed. But they should be performed without uttering the Veda Mantras.

> IX. 18. Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskars are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras they are as unclean as untruth is.

Offering sacrifices according to Brahmanism formed the very soul of religion. Yet Manu will not allow women to perform them. Manu ordains that:

> XI. 36. A woman shall not perform the daily sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas.

> XI. 37. If she does it she will go to hell.

To disable her from performing such sacrifices Manu prevents her from getting the aid and services of a Brahmin priest.

> IV. 205. A Brahman must never eat food given at a sacrifice performed by a woman.

> IV. 206. Sacrifices performed by women are inauspicious and not acceptable to God. They should therefore be avoided.

Woman was not to have any intellectual persuits nor free will, nor freedom of thought. She was not to join any heretical sect such as

Buddhism. If she continues to adhere to it till death she is not to be given the libation of water as is done in the case of all dead.

Finally a word regarding the ideal of life, Manu has sought to place before a woman. It had better be stated in his own words:

> V. 151. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives and when he is dead, she must not insult his memory.
>
> V. 154. Though destitute or virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.
>
> V. 155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women, apart from their husbands; if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.

Then comes the choicest texts which forms the pith and the marrow of this ideal which Manu prescribes for women:

> V. 153. The husband who wedded her with sacred Mantras, is always a source of happiness to his wife, both in season and out of season, in this world and in the next.
>
> V. 150. She must always be cheerful, clever in the management of her household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure.

This the Hindus regard as a very lofty ideal for a woman!

Compare with this the position of the woman before the days of Manu.

That a woman was entitled to Upanayan is clear from the Atharva Veda where a girl is spoken of as being eligible for marriage having finished her Brahmacharya. From the Shrauta Sutras it is clear that women could repeat the Mantras of the Vedas and that women were taught to read the Vedas. Panini's Ashtaadhyai bears testimony to the fact that women attended Gurukul and studied the various Shakhas of the Veda and became expert in Mimansa. Patanjali's Maha Bhashya shows that women were teachers and taught Vedas to girl students. The stories of women entering into public discussions with men on most abstruse subjects of religion, philosophy and metaphysics are by no means few. The story of public disputation between Janaka and Sulbha, between Yajnavalkya and Gargi, between Yajnavalkya and Maitrei and between Shankaracharya and Vidyadhari shows that Indian women in pre-Manu's time could rise to the highest pinnacle of learning and education.

That women in pre-Manu days were highly respected cannot be disputed. Among the Ratnis who played so prominent a part in the coronation of the King in Ancient India was the queen and the King

made her an offering[1] as he did to the others. Not only the king elect did homage to the Queen, he worshipped his other wives of lower castes[2]. In the same way the King offers salutation after the coronation ceremony to the, ladies of the chiefs of the shremes (guides[3]).

In the days of Kautilya women[4] were deemed to have attained their age of majority at 12 and men at 16. The age of majority was in all probability the age of marriage. That the marriages were post puberty marriages is clear from Baudhayanas' Grihya Sutras[5] where an expiatory ceremony is specially prescribed in the case of a bride passing her menses on the occasion of her marriage.

In Kautilya there is no law as to age of consent. That is because marriages were post puberty marriages and Kautilya is more concerned with cases in which a bride or a bridegroom is married without disclosing the fact of his or her having had sexual intercouse before marriage with another person or maiden in menses having had sexual intercouse. In the former case Kautilya says[6]:

> "Any person who has given a girl in marriage without announcing her guilt of having laid with another shall not only be punished with a fine but also be made to return the Sulka and Stridhana. Any person receiving a girl in marriage without announcing the blemishes of the bridegroom shall not only pay double the above fine, but also forfeit the Sulka and Stridhana (he paid for the bride). In regard to the latter case the rule in Kautilya[7] is:
>
> "It is no offence for a man of equal caste and rank to have connection with a maiden who has been unmarried three years after her first menses. Nor is it an offence for a man, even of different caste, to have connection with a maiden who has spent more than three years after her first menses and has no jewellery on her person."

Unlike Manu Kautilya's idea is monogamy. Man can marry more than one wife only under certain conditions. They are given by Kautilya in the following terms[1]:

> "If a woman either brings forth no (live) children, or has no male issue, or is barren, her husband shall wait for eight years (before marrying another). If she bears only a dead child, he has to wait for ten years. If she brings forth only females, he has to wait for twelve

[1] Jaiswal: Indian Polity, Part II, p. 16.

[2] *Ibid,* Part II, p. 17.

[3] *Ibid,* p. 82.

[4] Sham Shastri, Kautilya's Arthashastra, p. 175.

[5] Baudhyayana, I. 7. 22.

[6] Sham Shastri, Kautilya's Arthashastra, p. 222.

[7] *Ibid,* p. 259.

years. Then if he is desirious to have sons, he may marry another. In case of violating this rule, he shll be made to pay her not only Sulks, her property (Stridhana) and an adequate monetary compensation (adhivedanika martham), but also a fine of 24 panas to the Government. Having given the necessary amount of Sulka and property (Stridhana) even to those women who have not received such things on the occasion of their marriage with him, and also having given his wives the proportionate compensation and an adequate subsistence (vrutti), he may marry any number of women; for women are created for the sake of sons."

Unlike Manu in Kautilya's time women could claim divorce on the ground of mutual enmity and hatred.

"A woman, hating her husband, cannot dissolve her marriage with him against his will. Nor can a man dissolve his marriage with his wife against her will. But from mutual enmity, divorce may be obtained (parasparam dveshanmokshah). If a man, apprehending danger from his wife, desires divorce (mokshamichchhet), he shall return to her whatever she was given (on the occasion of her marriage). If a woman, under the apprehension of danger from her husband, desires divorce, she shall forfeit her claim to her property."

A wife can abandon her husband if he is a bad character.

"A woman who has a right to claim maintenance for an unlimited period of time shall be given as much food and clothing (grasacchadana) as necessary for her, or more than is neessary in proportion to the income of the maintainer (yathapurushapari-vapam va). If the period (for which such things are to be given to her with one-tenth of the amount in addition) is limited, then a certain amount of money, fixed in proportion to the income of the maintainer, shall be given to her; so also if she has not been given her Sulka, property, and compensation (due to her for allowing her husband to re-marry). If she places herself under the protection of any one belonging to her father-in-law's family (Svasurakula), or if she begins to live independently, then her husband shall not be sued (for her maintenance). Thus the determination of maintenance is dealt with."

In the days of Kautilya there was no ban on woman or a widow remarrying:

"On the death of her husband a woman, desirous to lead a pious life, shall at once receive not only her endowment and jewellery (sthapyabharanam), but also the balance of Sulka due to her. If after obtaining these two things she re-married another, she shall be caused to pay them back together with interest (on their value). If

she is desirous of a second marriage (kutumbarkama), she shall be given on the occasion of her re-marriage (nivesakale) whatever either her father-in-law or her husband or both had given to her. The time at which women can re-marry shall be explained in connection with the subject of long sojourn of husbands.

"If a widow marries any man other than of her father-in-law's selection (svasurapratilomyenanivishta), she shall forfeit whatever had been given to her by her father-in-law and her deceased husband.

"The kinsmen (gnatis) of a woman shall return to her old father-in-law whatever property of her own she had taken with her while, re-marrying a kinsman. Whoever justly takes a woman under his protection shall equally protect her property. No woman shall succeed in her attempt to establish her title to the property of her deceased husband, after she re-marries.

"if she lives a pious life, she may enjoy it (dharmakama bhunjita). No woman with a son or sons shall (after re-marriage) be at liberty to make free use of her own property (stridhana); for that property of hers, her sons shall receive.

"If a woman after re-marriage attempts to take possession of her own property under the plea of maintaining her sons by her former husband, she shall be made to endow it in their name. If a woman has many male children by many husbands, then she shall conserve, her property in the same condition as she had received from her husbands. Even that property which has been given her with full powers of enjoyment and disposal, a remarried woman shall endow in the name of her sons.

"A barren widow who is faithful to the bed of her dead husband may, under the protection of her teacher, enjoy her property as long as she lives; for it is to ward off calamities that women are endowed with property. On her death, her property shall pass into the hands of her kinsman (Dayada). If the husband is alive and the wife is dead, then her sons and daughters shall divide her property among themselves. If there are no sons, her daughters shall have it. In their absence her husband shall take that amount of money (sulka) which he had given her, and her relatives shall re-take whatever in the shape of gift or dowry they had presented her. Thus the determination of the property of a woman is dealt with."

"Wives who belong to Sudra, Vaisya, Kshatriya or Brahman caste, and who have not given birth to children, should wait as long as a year, two, three and four years respectively for their husbands who have gone abroad for a short time; but if they are such as have

given birth to children, they should wait for their absent husbands for more than a year. If they are provided with maintenance, they should wait for twice the period of time just mentioned. If they are not so provided with, their well-to-do gnatis should maintain them either for four or eight years. Then the gnatis should leave them to marry, after taking what had been presented to them on the occasion of their marriages. If the husband is a Brahman, studying abroad, his wife who has no issue should wait for him for ten years; but if she has given birth to children, she should wait for twelve years. If the husband is a servant of the king, his wife should wait for him till her death; but even if she bears children to a savarna husband (i.e. a second husband belonging to the same gotra as that of the former husband), with a view to avoid the extinction of her race, she shall not be liable to contempt thereof (savarnatascha prajata na' pavadam labheta). If the wife of an absent husband lacks maintenance and is deserted by well-to-do gnatis, she may remarry one whom she likes and who is in a position to maintian her and relieve her misery."

Unlike Manu every precaution was taken to guarantee economic independence to a married woman. This is clear from the following provisions in Kautilya's Arthashastra relating to wife's endowment and maintenance:

"Means of subsistence (vruti) or jewellery (abadhya) constitutes what is called the property of a woman. Means of subsistence valued at above two thousand shall be endowed (in her name). There is no limit to jewellery. It is no guilt for the wife to make use of this property in maintaining her son, her daughter-in-law, or herself, whenever her absent husband has made no provision for her maintenance. In calamities, disease and famine, in warding off dangers and in charitable acts, the husband, too, may make use of this property. Neither shall there by any complaint against the enjoyment of this property by mutual consent by a couple who have brought forth a twin. Nor shall there be any complaint if this property has been enjoyed for three years by those who are wedded in accordance with the customs of the first four kinds of marriage. But the enjoyment of this property in the cases of Gandharva and Asura marriages shall be liable to be restored together with interest on it. In the case of such marriages as are called Rakshasa and Paisacha, the use of this property shall be dealt with as theft. Thus the duty of marriage is dealt with."

"A woman who has a right to claim maintenance for an unlimited period of time shall be given as much food and clothing

(grasachhadan) as is necessary for her, or more than is necessary in proportion to the income of the maintainer (yatha-purushaparivapam va). If the period (for which such things are to be given to her with one-tenth of the amount in addition) is limited, then a certain amount of money, fixed in proportion to the income of the maintainer, shall be given to her; so also if she has not been given her sulka, property, and compensation (due to her for allowing her husband to re-marry). If she places herself under the protection of any one belonging to her father-in-law's family (svasurkula), or if she begins to live independently, then her husband shall not be sued (for her maintenance). Thus the determination of maintenance is dealt with."

Surprising as it may appear in Kautilya's time a wife could bring an action in a court of law against her husband for assault and defamation.

In short in pre-Manu days a woman was free and equal partner of man.

Why did Manu degrade her?

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RIDDLE NO. 18

MANU'S MADNESS OR THE BRAHMANIC EXPLANATION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE MIXED CASTES

A reader of the Manu Smriti will find that Manu for the purposes of his discussion groups the various castes under certain specific heads namely (1) Aryan Castes, (2) Non-Aryan Castes, (3) Vratya Castes, (4) Fallen Castes and (5) Sankara Castes.

By Aryan Castes he means the four varnas namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. In other words, Manu regards the system of Chaturvarna to be the essence of Aryanism. By Non-Aryan Castes he means those communities who do not accept the creed of Chaturvarna and he, cites the community called Dasyu as an illustration of those whom he regards as a Non-Aryan community[1]. By Vratyas he means those castes who were once believers in the Chaturvarna but who had rebelled against it.

The list of Vratyas given by Manu includes the following castes:

Vratya Brahmanas	Vratya Kshatriyas	Vratya Vaishyas
1. Bhrigga Kantaka	1. Jhalla	1. Sudhanvana
2. Avantya	2. Malla	2. Acharya
3. Vatadhana	3. Lacchavi	3. Karusha
4. Phushpada	4. Nata	4. Vijanman
5. Saikha	5. Karana	5. Maitra
	6. Khasa	6. Satvata
	7. Dravida.	

[1] Manu X. 45. This verse is of great significance for two reasons. In the first place, it shows Shudra as different from Dasyu. In the second place, it shows that a Shudra is an Arya.

This is about 20-page MS on 'the origin of the mixed castes'. Through the original typed MS several handwritten pages are inserted by the author and the text has been modified with several amendments pasted on the pages.—Ed.

In the list of Fallen Castes Manu includes those Kshatriyas who have become Shudras by reason of the disuse of Aryan rites and ceremonies and loss of services of the Brahmin priests. They are enumerated by Manu as under:

1. Paundrakas
2. Cholas
3. Dravidas
4. Kambhojas
5. Yavanas
6. Sakas
7. Paradas
8. Pahlvas
9. Chinas
10. Kiratas
11. Daradas

By Sankara Castes Manu means Castes the members of which are born of parents who do not belong to the same caste.

These mixed castes he divides into various categories (1) Progeny of different Aryan Castes which he subdivides into two classes (a) Anuloma and (b) Pratiloma, (2) Progeny of Anuloma and Pratiloma Castes and (3) Progeny of Non-Aryan and the Aryan Anuloma and Pratiloma Castes. Those included by Manu under the head of mixed castes are shown below under different categories:

1. PROGENY OF MIXED ARYAN CASTES

Father	Mother	Progeny known as	Anuloma or Pratiloma
Brahman	Kshatriya	?	
Brahman	Vaishya	Ambashta	Anuloma
Brahman	Shudra	Nishad (Parasava)	Anuloma
Kshatriya	Brahman	Suta	Pratiloma
Kshatriya	Vaishya	?	
Kshatriya	Shudra	Ugra	Anuloma
Vaishya	Brahman	Vaidehaka	Pratiloma
Vaishya	Kshatriya	Magadha	Pratiloma
Vaishya	Shudra	Karana	Anuloma
Shudra	Brahman	Chandala	Pratiloma
Shudra	Kshatriya	Ksattri	Pratiloma
Shudra	Vaishya	Ayogava	Pratiloma

2. PROGENY OF ARYAN CASTES WITH ANULOMA-PRATILOMA CASTES

Father	Mother	Progeny known as
1. Brahman	Ugra	Avrita
2. Brahman	Ambashta	Abhira
3. Brahman	Abhira	Dhigvana
4. Shudra	Nishada	Kukutaka

3. PROGENY OF MIXED MARRIAGES BETWEEN ANULOMA AND PRATILOMA CASTES

Father	Mother	Progeny known as
1. Vaideha	Ayogava	Maitreyaka
2. Nishada	Ayogava	Margava (Das)
		Kaivarta
3. Nishada	Vaideha	Karavara
4. Vaidehaka	Ambashta	Vena
5. Vaidehaka	Karavara	Andhra
6. Vaidehaka	Nishada	Meda
7. Chandala	Vaideha	Pandusopaka
8. Nishada	Vaideha	Ahindaka
9. Chandala	Pukkassa	Sopaka
10. Chandala	Nishada	Antyavasin
11. Kshattari	Ugra	Swapaka

To Manu's list of Sankar (mixed) Castes additions have been made by his successors. Among these are the authors of Aushanas Smriti, Baudhayana Smriti, Vashistha Smriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti and the Suta Sanhita.

Of these additions four have been made by the Aushanas Smriti. They are noted below:

Name of the mixed caste	Father's caste	Mother's caste
1. Pulaksa	Shudra	Kshatriya
2. Yekaj	Pulaksa	Vaishya
3. Charmakarka	Ayogava	Brahmin
4. Venuka	Suta	Brahmin

The following four are added by the Baudhayana Smriti:

Name of the mixed caste	Father's caste	Mother's caste
1. Kshatriya	Kshatriya	Vaishya
2. Brahmana	Brahmana	Kshatriya
3. Vaina	Vaidehaka	Ambashta
4. Shvapaka	Ugra	Kshatriya

The Vashishta Smriti adds one to the list of Manu, namely:

Name of the mixed caste	Father's caste	Mother's caste
Vaina	Shudra	Kshatriya

The Yajnavalkya Smriti adds two new castes to Manu's list of mixed castes.

Name of the mixed caste	Father's caste	Mother's caste
1. Murdhavasika	Brahmin	Kshatriya
2. Mahisya	Kshatriya	Vaishya

The Additions made by the author of the Suta Sanhita are on a vast scale. They number sixty-three castes.

Name of the mixed caste		Father's caste	Mother's caste
1.	Ambashteya	Kshatriya	Vaishya
2.	Urdhvanapita	Brahman	Vaishya
3.	Katkar	Vaishya	Shudra
4.	Kumbhkar	Brahman	Vaishya
5.	Kunda	Brahman	Married Brahmin
6.	Golaka	Brahman	Brahmin Widow
7.	Chakri	Shudra	Vaishya
8.	Daushantya	Kshatriya	Shudra
9.	Daushantee	Kshatriya	Shudra
10.	Pattanshali	Shudra	Vaishya
11.	Pulinda	Vaishya	Kshatriya
12.	Bahyadas	Shudra	Brahmin
13.	Bhoja	Vaishya	Kshatriya
14.	Mahikar	Vaishya	Vaishya
15.	Manavika	Shudra	Shudra
16.	Mleccha	Vaishya	Kshatriya
17.	Shalika	Vaishya	Kshatriya
18.	Shundika	Brahmin	Shudra
19.	Shulikha	Kshatriya	Shudra
20.	Saparna	Brahman	Kshatriya
21.	Agneyanartaka	Ambashta	Ambashta
22.	Apitar	Brahman	Daushanti
23.	Ashramaka	Dantakevala	Shudra

Name of the mixed caste		Father's caste	Mother's caste
24.	Udabandha	Sanaka	Kshatriya
25.	Karana	Nata	Kshatriya
26.	Karma	Karana	Kshatriya
27.	Karmakar	Renuka	Kshatriya
28.	Karmar	Mahishya	Karana
29.	Kukkunda	Magadha	Shudra
30.	Guhaka	Swapach	Brahman
31.	Charmopajivan	Vaidehika	Brahman
32.	Chamakar	Ayogava	Brahmani
33.	Charmajivi	Nishad	Karushi
34.	Taksha	Mahishya	Karana
35.	Takshavriti	Ugra	Brahman
36.	Dantakavelaka	Chandala	Vaishya
37.	Dasyu	Nishad	Ayogava
38.	Drumila	Nishad	Kshatriya
39.	Nata	Picchalla	Kshatriya
40.	Napita	Nishada	Brahmin
41.	Niladivarnavikreta	Ayogava	Chirkari
42.	Piccahalla	Malla	Kshatriya
43.	Pingala	Brahmin	Ayogava
44.	Bhaglabdha	Daushanta	Brahmani
45.	Bharusha	Sudhanva	Vaishya
46.	Bhairava	Nishada	Shudra
47.	Matanga	Vijanma	Vaishya
48.	Madhuka	Vaidehika	Ayogava
49.	Matakar	Dasyu	Vaishya
50.	Maitra	Vijanma	Vaishya
51.	Rajaka	Vaideha	Brahman
52.	Rathakar	Mahishya	Karana
53.	Renuka	Napita	Brahman
54.	Lohakar	Mahishya	Brahmani
55.	Vardhaki	Mahishya	Brahmani
56.	Varya	Sudhanva	Vaishya
57.	Vijanma	Bharusha	Vaishya
58.	Shilp	Mahishya	Karana
59.	Shvapach	Chandala	Brahmani
60.	Sanaka	Magadha	Kshatriya
61.	Samudra	Takashavrati	Vaishya
62.	Satvata	Vijanma	Vaishya
63.	Sunishada	Nishad	Vaishya

Of the five categories of castes it is easy to understand the explanation given by Manu as regards the first four. But the same cannot be said in respect of his treatment of the fifth category namely the *Sankar* (mixed) caste. There are various questions that begin to trouble the mind. In the first place Manu's list of mixed castes is a perfunctory list. It is not an exhaustive list, stating all the possibilities of *Sankar*.

In discussing the mixed castes born out of the mixture of the Aryan castes with the Anuloma-Pratiloma castes, Manu should have specified the names of castes which are the progeny of each of the four Aryan castes with each of the 12 Anuloma-Pratiloma castes. If he had done so we should have had a list of forty-eight resulting castes. As a matter of fact he states only the names of four castes of mixed marriages of this category.

In discussing the progeny of mixed marriages between Anuloma-Pratiloma castes given the fact that we have 12 of them, Manu should have given the names of 144 resulting castes. As a matter of fact, Manu only gives a list of 11 castes. In the formation of these 11 castes, Manu gives five possible combinations of 5 castes only. Of these one (Vaideha) is outside the Anuloma-Pratiloma list. The case of the 8 are not considered at all.

His account of the Sankar castes born out of the Non-Aryan and the Aryan castes is equally discrepant. We ought to have had first a list of castes resulting from a combination between the Non-Aryans with each of the four Aryan castes. We have none of them. Assuming that there was only one Non-Aryan caste—Dasyu—we ought to have had a list of 12 castes resulting from a conjugation of Dasyus with each of the Anuloma-Pratiloma castes. As a matter of fact we have in Manu only one conjugation.

In the discussion of this subject of mixed castes Manu does not consider the conjugation between the Vratyas and the Aryan castes, the Vratyas and the Anuloma-Pratiloma castes, the Vratyas and the Non-Aryan castes.

Among these omissions by Manu there are some that are glaring as well as significant. Take the case of Sankar between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. He does not mention the caste born out of the Sankar between these two. Nor does he mention whether the Sankar caste begotten of these two was a Pratiloma or Anuloma. Why did Manu fail to deal with this question. Is it to be supposed that such a Sankar did not occur in his time? Or was he afraid to mention it? If so, of whom was he afraid ?

Some of the names of the mixed castes mentioned by Manu and the other Smritikaras appear to be quite fictitious.

For some of the communities mentioned as being of bastard origin have never been heard of before Manu. Nor does any one know what has happened to them since. They are today non-existent without leaving any trace behind. Caste is an insoluble substance and once a caste is formed it maintains its separate existence, unless for any special reason it dies out. This can happen but to a few.

Who are the *Ayogava, Dhigvana, Ugra, Pukkasa, Svapaka, Svapacha, Pandusopaka, Ahindaka, Bandika, Matta, Mahikar, Shalika, Shundika, Shulika, Yekaj, Kukunda* to mention only a few. Where are they? What has happened to them?

Let us now proceed to compare Manu with the rest of Smritikars. Are they unanimous on the origin of the various mixed castes referred to by them? Far from it compare the following cases.

	Smriti	Father's caste	Mother's caste
		I AYOGAVA	
1.	Manu	Shudra	Vaishya
2.	Aushanas	Vaishya	Kshatriya
3.	Yajnavalkya	Shudra	Vaishya
4.	Baudhayana	Vaishya	Kshatriya
5.	Agni Purana	Shudra	Kshatriya
		II UGRA	
1.	Manu	Kshatriya	Shudra
2.	Aushanas	Brahman	Shudra
3.	Yajnavalkya	Kshatriya	Vaishya
4.	Vashishtha	Kshatriya	Vaishya
5.	Suta	Vaishya	Shudra
		III NISHADA	
1.	Manu	Brahmana	Shudra
2.	Aushanas	Brahmana	Shudra
3.	Baudhayana	Brahmana	Shudra
4.	Yajnavalkya	Brahmana	Shudra
5.	Suta Sanhita	Brahmana	Vaishya
6.	Suta Sanhita	Brahmana	Shudra
7.	Vashishta	Vaishya	Shudra
		IV PUKKASA	
1.	Manu	Nishada	Shudra
2.	Brihad-Vishnu	Shudra	Kshatriya
3.	Brihad-Vishnu	Vaishya	Kshatriya

	Smriti	Father's caste	Mother's caste
		V MAGADHA	
1.	Manu	Vaishya	Kshatriya
2.	Suta	Vaishya	Kshatriya
3.	Baudhayana	Shudra	Vaishya
4.	Yajnavalkya	Vaishya	Kshatriya
5.	Brihad Vishnu	Vaishya	Kshatriya
6.	Brihad Vishnu	Shudra	Kshatriya
7.	Brihad Vishnu	Vaishya	Brahmana
		VI RATHAKAR	
1.	Aushanas	Kshatriya	Brahmana
2.	Baudhayana	Vaishya	Shudra
3.	Suta	Kshatriya	Brahmana
		VII VAIDEHAKA	
1.	Manu	Shudra	Vaishya
2.	Manu	Vaishya	Brahmana
3.	Yajnavalkya	Vaishya	Brahmana

If these different Smritikaras are dealing with facts about the origin and genesis of the mixed castes mentioned above how can such a wide difference of opinion exist among them? The conjugation of two castes can logically produce a third mixed caste. But how the conjugation of the same two castes produce a number of different castes ? But this is exactly what Manu and his followers seem to be asserting. Consider the following cases:

I. Conjugation of Kshatriya father and Vaishya mother.
   1. Baudhyayana says that the caste of the progeny is *Kshatriya.*
   2. Yajnavalkya says it is *Mahishya.*
   3. Suta says it is *Ambashta.*

II. Conjugation of Shudra father and Kshatriya mother—
   1. Manu says the Progeny is *Ksattri.*
   2. *Aushanas says it is Pullaksa.*
   3. Vashishta says it is *Vaina.*

III. Conjugation of Brahmana father and Vaishya mother.
   1. Manu says that the progeny is called Ambashta.
   2. Suta once says it is called *Urdhava Napita* but again says it is called *Kumbhakar.*

IV. Conjugation of Vaishya father and Kshatriya mother—
   1. Manu says that the progeny is called *Magadha.*

2. Suta states that (1) Bhoja, (2) Mleccha, (3) Shalik and (4) Pulinda are the Progenies of this single conjugation.

V. Conjugation of Kshatriya father and Shudra mother—

1. Manu says that the progeny is called Ugra.
2. Suta says that (1) Daushantya, (2) Daushantee and (3) Shulika are the progenies of this single conjugation.

VI. Conjugation of Shudra father and Vaishya mother—

1. Manu says the progeny is called Ayogava.
2. Suta says the progeny is (1) Pattanshali and (2) Chakri.

Let us take up another question. Is Manu's explanation of the genesis of the mixed castes historically true?

To begin with the Abhira. According to Manu the Abhiras are the bastards born of Brahmin males and Ambashta females. What does history say about them? History says that the Abhiras (the corrupt form of which is Ahira) were pastoral tribes which inhabited the lower districts of the North-West as far as Sindh. They were a ruling independent Tribe and according to the Vishnu Purana[1] the Abhiras conquered Magadha and reigned there for several years.

The *Ambashta*[2] says Manu are the bastards born of Brahmana male and Vaishya female. Patanjali speaks of Ambashtyas as those who are the natives of a country called Ambashta. That the Ambashtas were an independent tribe is beyond dispute. The Ambashtas are mentioned by Megasthenes the Greek Ambassador at the Court of Chandragupta Maurya as one of the tribes living in the Punjab who fought against Alexander when he invaded India. The Ambashtas are mentioned in the Mahabharata. They were reputed for their political system and for their bravery.

The *Andhras*[3] says Manu are bastards of second degree in so far as they are the progeny of Vaidehaka male and Karavara female both of which belong to bastard castes. The testimony of history is quite different. The Andhras are a people who inhabited that part of the country which forms the eastern part of the Deccan Plateau. The Andhras are mentioned by Megasthenes. Pliny the Elder (77 A.D.) refers to them as a powerful tribe enjoying paramount sway over their land in the Deccan, possessed numerous villages, thirty walled towns defended by moats and lowers and supplies their king with an immense army consisting of 1,00,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry and 1,000 elephants.

[1] Book IV Chapter 24.

[2] For Ambashtas see Jaiswal's Hindu Polity—Part-I, pp. 73-74.

[3] For the Andhras see—Early Dynasties of Andhradesa—by Bhavaraju Venkata Krishnarao. They are also called Satavahanas.

According to Manu the *Magadhas*[1] are bastards born of Vaishya male and Kshatriya female. Panini the Grammarian gives quite a different derivation of 'Magadha'. According to him "Magadha" means a person who comes from the country known as Magadha. Magadha corresponds roughly to the present Patna and Gaya districts of Bihar. The Magadhas have been mentioned as independent sovereign people right from the earliest times. They are first mentioned in the Atharva-Veda. The famous Jarasandha was the king of Magadha who was a contemporary of the Pandavas.

According to Manu the *Nishadas* are the bastards born caste from Brahmin males and Shudra females. History has quite a different tale to tell. The Nishadas were a native tribe with its own independent territory and its own kings. They are a very ancient tribe. The Ramayana mentions Guha as the King of Nishadas whose capital was Sringaverapura and who showed hospitality to Rama when he was undergoing excile in the forest.

As to the *Vaidehaka* Manu says that they are the bastards born of Vaishya Male and Brahmin female. Etymologically Vaidehaka means a person who is a native of the country called Videha[2]. Ancient *Videha* corresponds to the modern districts of Champaran and Darbhanga in Bihar. The country and its people have been known to history from a very remote antiquity. The Yajur-Veda mentions them. Ramayana refers to them. Sita the wife of Rama is the daughter of Janak who was the king of Videha and whose capital was Mithila.

Many more cases could be examined. Those that have been are quite sufficient to show how Manu has perverted history and defamed the most respectable and powerful tribes into bastards. This wholesale bastardization of huge communities Manu did not apply to the Vratyas. But his successors carried the scheme further and bastardized the Vratyas also. Karma in Manu is Vratya. But the Brahma Vaivarta Purana makes them Bastards and says that they are the progeny of Vaishya father and Shudra mother. Paundraka in Manu is Vratya. But in the Brahmavaivarta Purana he is a bastard born of Vaishya father and Chundi mother. Malla in Manu is Vratya. But in the Brahma Vaivarta Purana he is a bastard born of Letta father and Tibara mother. The Vharjjakautakas are Vratya Brahmanas according to Manu. But in the Gautama Sanhita they are bastards born from a Brahman father and Vaishya mother. The Yavanas were declared by Manu as Vratya Kshatriya. But in Gautama Sanhita they are shown as bastards born of a Kshatriya father and Shudra mother.

[1] For the History of Magadha see Chapter IV of Ancient Indian Tribes by B.C. Law.

[2] For the History of the Videhas see part II Chapter I of Kshatriya clans in Buddhist India by B.C. Law.

The Kiratas are according to Manu Vratya Kshatriyas. But the Ballalacharitta makes them bastards born from Vaishya father and Brahmin mother.

It is quite clear that some of the communities mentioned by Manu as being bastard in origin far from being bastard were independent in origin and yet Manu and the rest of the Smratikara's call them Bastards. Why this madness on their part ? Is there a method in their madness?

Having regard to all these considerations it is a riddle why Manu at all raised the question of mixed castes and what he wanted to say about them?

It is possible that Manu had realized that the Chaturvarna had failed and that the existence of a large number of castes which should neither be described as Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras was the best proof of the break down of the Chaturvarna and that he was therefore called upon to explain how these castes who were outside the Chaturvarna came into existence notwithstanding the rule of Chaturvarnas.

But did Manu realize how terrible is the Explanation which he has given? What does his explanation amount to?

What a reflection on the character of men and particularly of women. It is obvious that the unions of men and women must have been clandestine because prohibited by the rule of Chaturvarna. Such clandestine unions could take place only here and there. They could not have taken place on a wholesale scale. But unless one assumes a wholesale state of promiscuity how can one justify the origin of the Chandals or untouchables as given by Manu.

The caste of Chandala is said by Manu to be the progeny of illegitimate intercourse between a Shudra male and a Brahman female. Can this be true? It means that Brahmin women must have been very lax in their morality and must have had special sexual attraction for the Shudra[1]. This is unbelievable.

So vast is the Chandala population that even if every Brahmin female was a mistress of a Shudra it could not account of the vast number of Chandalas in the country.

Did Manu realize by propounding his theory of the origin of the mixed castes he was assigning an ignoble origin to a vast number of the people of this country leading to their social and moral degradation. Why did he say that the castes were mixed in origin, when as a matter of fact they were independent in their existence?

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1 Megasthenes records that the ancient Brahmins were distrustful of their wives and did not communicate their metaphysical doctrine to women on the ground that being talkative they would communicate their knowledge to those who had no right to it which probably means the Shudras.

RIDDLE No. 19

THE CHANGE FROM PATERNITY TO MATERNITY. WHAT DID THE BRAHMINS WISH TO GAIN BY IT?

Mr. Mayne in his treatise on Hindu law has pointed out some anomalous features of the rules of Kinships. He says:

"No part of the Hindu Law is more anomalous than that which governs the family relations. Not only does there appear to be a complete break of continuity between the ancient system and that which now prevails, but the different parts of the ancient system appear in this respect to be in direct conflict with each other. We find a law of inheritance, which assumes the possibility of tracing male ancestors in an unbroken pedigre extending to fourteen generations; while coupled with it is a family law, in which several admitted forms of marriage are only euphemisms for seduction and rape, and in which twelve sorts of sons are recognized, the majority of whom have no blood relationship to their own father."

The existence of this anomaly is a fact and will be quite clear to those who care to study the Hindu Law of marriage and paternity.

The Hindu Law recognizes eight different forms of marriage, namely (1) Brahma, (2) Daiva, (3) Arsha, (4) Prajapatya, (5) Asura, (6) Gandharva, (7) Rakshasa and (8) Paisacha.

The Brahma marriage is the gift of a daughter, clothed and decked to a man learned in the Veda, whom her father voluntarily invites and respectfully receives.

The Daiva marriage consists of the giving of the daughter by father to the family priest attending a sacrifice at the time of the payment of the sacrificial fee and in lieu of it.

Arsha marriage is characterized by the fact that the bridegroom has to pay a price for the bride to the father of the bride.

Prajapatya form of marriage is marked by the application of a man for a girl to be his wife and the granting of the application by the

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This is an eleven-page typed chapter. Except the title of the chapter no other additions are found in the handwriting of the author.—Ed.

father of the girl. The difference between Prajapatya and Brahma marriage lies in the fact that in the latter the gift of the daughter is made by the father voluntarily but has to be applied for. The fifth or the *Asura* form of marriage is that in which the bridegroom having given as much wealth as he can afford to the father and paternal kinsmen and to the girl herself takes her as his wife. There is not much difference between *Arsha* and Asura forms of marriage. Both involve sale of the bride. The difference lies in this that in the Arsha form the price is fixed while in the Asura form it is not.

Gandharva marriage is a marriage by consent contracted from non-religious and sensual motives. Marriage by seizure of a maiden by force from her house while she weeps and calls for assistance after her kinsmen and friends have been slain in battle or wounded and their houses broken open, is the marriage styled *Rakshasa*.

Paisacha marriage is marriage by rape on a girl either when she is asleep or flushed with strong liquor or disordered in her intellect.

Hindu Law recognized thirteen kinds of sons. (1) Aurasa, (2) Kshetraja, (3) Pautrikaputra, (4) Kanina, (5) Gudhaja, (6) Punarbhava, (7) Sahodhaja, (8) Dattaka, (9) Kritrima, (10) Kritaka, (11) Apaviddha, (12) Svayamdatta and (13) Nishada.

The *Aurasa* is a son begotten by a man himself upon his lawfully wedded wife.

Putrikaputra means a son born to a daughter. Its significance lies in the system under which a man who had a daughter but no son could also have his daughter to cohabit with a man selected or appointed by him. If a daughter gave birth to a son by such sexual intercourse the son became the son of the girl's father. It was because of this that the son was called Putrikaputra. Man's right to compel his daughter to submit to sexual intercourse with a man of his choice in order to get a son for himself continued to exist even after the daughter was married. That is why a man was warned not to marry a girl who had no brothers.

Kshetraja literally means son of the field i.e., of the wife. In Hindu ideology the wife is likened to the field and the husband being likened to the master of the field. Where the husband was dead, or alive but impotent or incurably diseased the brother or any other *sapinda* of the deceased was appointed by the family to procreate a son on the wife. The practice was called *Niyoga* and the son so begotten was called *Kshetraja*.

If an unmarried daughter living in the house of her father has through illicit intercourse given birth to a son and if she subsequently was married the son before marriage was claimed by her husband as his son. Such a son was called *Kanina*.

The *Gudhaja* was apparently a son born to a woman while the husband had access to her but it is suspected that he is born of an adulterous connection. As there is no proof by an irrebutable presumption so to say the husband is entitled to claim the son as his own. He is called *Gudhaja* because his birth is clouded in suspicious, Gudha meaning suspicion.

Sahodhaja is a son born to a woman who was pregnant at the time of her marriage. It is not certain whether he is the son of the husband who had access to the mother before marriage or whether it is the case of a son begotten by a person other than the husband. But it is certain that the *Sahodhaja,* is a son born to a pregnant maiden and claimed as his son by the man who marries her.

Punarbhava is the son of a woman who abandoned by her husband and having lived with others, re-enters his family. It is also used to denote the son of a woman who leaves an impotent, outcaste, or a mad or diceased husband and takes another husband.

Parasava[1] is the son of a Brahmin by his Shudra wife.

The rest of the sons are adopted sons as distinguished for those who were claimed as sons.

Dattaka is the son whom his father and mother give in adoption to another whose son he then becomes.

Kratrima is a son adopted with the adoptee's consent only.

Krita is a son purchased from his parents.

Apaviddha is a boy abandoned by his parents and is then taken in adopted and reckoned as a son.

Svayamdatta is a boy bereft of parents or abandoned by them seeks a man shelter and presents himself saying 'Let me become thy son' when accepted he becomes his son.

It will be noticed how true it is to say that many forms of marriage are only euphemisms for seduction and rape and how many of the sons have no blood relationship to their father. These different forms of marriage and different kinds of sons were recognized as lawful even up to the time of Mana and even the changes made by Manu are very minor. With regard to the forms of marriage Manu[2] does not declare them to be illegal. All that he says that of the eight forms, six, namely, Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paisachya are lawful for a Kshatriya, and that three namely Asura, Gandharva and Paisachya are lawful for a Vaishya and a Shudra.

[1] He was also called Nishad. Jimutvahana seems to make a difference between Parasava and Nishad. Parasava he says is the son of a Brahmin by an unmarried Shudra woman while Nishad is the son of a Brahmin by his Shudra wife.

[2] Manu III. 23.

Similarly he does not disaffiliate any of the 12 sons. On the contrary he recognises their kinship. The only change he makes is to alter the rules of inheritance by putting them into two classes (1) heirs and kinsmen and (2) kinsmen but not heirs. He says[1] :

> 159. "The legitimate son of the body, the son begotten on a wife, the son adopted, the son made, the son secretly born, and the son cast off (are) the six heirs and kinsmen."
>
> 160. "The son of an unmarried damsel, the son received with the wife, the son bought, the son begotten on a remarried woman; the son self-given and the son of a Sudra female (are) the six (who are) not heirs, (but) kinsmen."
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> 162. "If the two heirs of one man be a legitimate son of his body and a son begotten on his wife, each (of the two sons), to the exclusion of the other, shall take the estate of his (natural) father."
>
> 163. "The legitimate son of the body alone (shall be) the owner of the paternal estate; but, in order to avoid harshness, let him allow a maintenance to the rest."

There is another part of the law of consanguinity which has undergone a profound change but which has hardly been noticed by anybody. It relates to the determination of the Varna of the child. What is to be the Varna of the child? Is it to be the father's Varna or the mother's Varna? According to the law as it prevailed in the days before Manu the Varna of the child was determined by the Varna of the father. The Varna of the mother was of no account. A few illustrations will suffice to prove the thesis.

	Father		Mother		Child	
	Name	Varna	Name	Varna	Name	Varna
1.	Shantanu	Kshatriya	Ganga	Unknown	Bhishma	Kshatriya
2.	Parashara	Brahmana	Matsyagandha	Fisherman	Krishna Dwaya	Brahman
3.	Vashishtha	Brahmana	Akshamala		Payan	
4.	Shantanu	Kshatriya	Matsyagandha	Fisherman	Vichitravirya	Kshatriya
5.	Vishwamitra	Kshatriya	Menaka	Apsara	Shakuntala	Kshatriya
6.	Yayati	Kshatriya	Devayani	Brahmin	Yadu	Kshatriya
7.	Yayati	Kshatriya	Sharmishtha	Asuri	Druhya	Kshatriya
8.	Jaratkaru	Brahman	Jaratkari	Naga	Astika	Brahmin

[1] Manu IX. 159-160: 162-163: pp. 359-60.

What does Manu do? The changes made by Manu in the law of the child's Varna are of a most revolutionary character. Manu[1] lays down the following rules:

> 5. "In all castes (varna) those (children) only which are begotten in the direct order on wedded wives, equal (in caste) and married as (virgins) are to be considered as belonging to the same caste (as their fathers)."
>
> 6. " Sons, begotten by twice-born men on wives of the next lower castes, they declare to be similar (to their fathers, but) blamed on account of the fault (inherent) in their mothers."
>
> 14. "Those sons of the twice-born, begotten on wives of the next lower castes, who have been enumerated in due order, they call by the name Anantaras (belonging to the next lower caste) on account of the blemish (inherent) in their mothers"
>
> 41. "Six sons, begotten (by Aryans) on women of equal and the next lower castes (Anantara), have the duties of twice-born men; but all those born in consequence of a violation of the law are, as regards their duties, equal to Sudras."

Manu distinguishes the following cases:

(1) Where the father and mother belong to the same Varna.

(2) Where the mother belongs to a Varna next lower to that of the father e.g., Brahman father and Kshatriya mother, Kshatriya father and Vaishya mother, Vaishya father and Shudra mother.

(3) Where the mother belongs to a Varna more than one degree lower to that of the father, e.g., Brahmin father and Vaishya or Shudra mother, Kshatriya father and Shudra mother.

In the first case the Varna of the child is to be the Varna of the father. In the second case also the Varna of the child is to be the Varna of the father. But in the third case the child is not to have the father's Varna. Manu does not expressly say what is to be the Varna of the child if it is not to be that of the father. But all the commentators of Manu Medhatithi, Kalluka Bhatt, Narada and Nandapandit—agree

saying what of the course is obvious that in such cases the Varna of the child shall be the Varna of the mother. In short Manu altered the law of the child's Varna from that of Pitrasavarna—according to father's Varna to Matrasavarna—according to mother's Varna.

This is most revolutionary change. It is a pity few have realized that given the forms of marriage, kinds of sons, the permissibility of Anuloma marriages and the theory of Pitrasavarnya, the Varna system notwithstanding the desire of the Brahmins to make it a closed system remained an open system. There were so many holes so to say in the

[1] Manu Chap. X verses 5, 6, 14 and 41, pp. 402, 403, 404 and 412.

Varna system. Some of the forms of marriage had no relation to the theory of the Varna. Indeed they could not have. The Rakshas and the Paisachya marriages were in all probability marriages in which the males belonged to the lower varnas and the females to the higher varnas. The law of sonship probably left many loopholes for the sons of Shudra to pass as children of the Brahmin. Take for instances sons such as Gudhajas, Sahodhajas, Kanina. Who can say that they were not begotten by Shudra or Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya. Whatever doubts there may be about these the Anuloma system of marriage which was sanctioned by law combined with the law of Pitrasavarnya had the positive effect of keeping the Varna system of allowing the lower Varnas to pass into the higher Varna. A Shudra could not become a Brahmin, a Kshatriya or a Vaishya. But the child of a Shudra woman could become a Vaishya if she was married to a Vaishya, a Kshatriya if she was married to a Kshatriya and even a Brahmin if she was married to a Brahmin. The elevation and the incorporation of the lower orders into the higher orders was positive and certain though the way of doing it was indirect. This was one result of the old system. The other result was that a community of a Varna was always a mixed and a composite community. A Brahmin community might conceivably consist of children born of Brahmin women, Kshatriya women, Vaishya women, and Shudra women all entitled to the rights and privileges belonging to the Brahmin community. A Kshatriya community may conceivably consist of children born of Kshatriya women, Vaishya women and Shudra women all recognized as Kshatriya and entitled to the rights and privileges of the Kshatriya community. Similarly the Vaishya community may conceivably consist of children born of Vaishya women and Shudra women all recognized as Vaishyas and entitled to the rights and privileges of the Vaishya community.

The change made by Manu is opposed to some of the most fundamental notions of Hindu Law. In the first place, it is opposed to the Kshetra-Kshetraja rule of Hindu Law. According to this rule, which deals with the question of property in a child says that the owner of the child is the *de jure* husband of the mother and not the *de facto* father of the child. Manu is aware of this theory. He puts it in the following terms[1]:

> "Thus men who have no marital property in women, but sow in the fields owned by others, may raise up fruit to the husbands, but the procreator can have no advantage from it. Unless there be a special agreement between the owners of the land and of the seed

[1] Mayne Hindu Law p. 83.

the fruit belongs clearly to the landowner, for the receptacle is more important than the seed."

It is on this that the right to the 12 kinds of sons is founded.

This change was also opposed to the rule of Patna Potestas. Hindu family is a Patriarchal family same as the Roman family. In both the father possessed certain authority over members of the family. Manu is aware of this and recognized it in most ample terms. Defining the authority of the Hindu father, Manu says:

"Three persons, a wife, a son, and a slave, are declared by law to have in general no wealth exclusively their own; the wealth which they may earn is regularly acquired for the man to whom they belong."

They belong to the head of the family—namely the father. Under the Patna Potestas the sons earnings are the property of the father. The change in the law of paternity mean a definite loss to the father.

Why did Manu change the law from Pitra-savarnya to Matra-savarnya ?

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*HINDU MARRIAGES VALIDITY BILL

Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava (East Punjab : General); Sir, I beg to move for leave to introduce a Bill to provide that marriages between Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and their different castes and sub-castes are valid.

Mr. Speaker : The question is:

> "That leave be granted to introduce a Bill to provide that marriages between Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and their different castes and sub-castes are valid."

The motion was adopted.

Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava : Sir, I introduce the Bill.

*HINDU CODE

* **The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar** (Minister for Law) : I beg to move:

> "That the Bill to amend and codify certain branches of the Hindu Law, be referred to a Select Committee consisting of Shri Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, Dr. Bakshi Tek Chand, Shri M. Anantthasayanam Ayyangar, Shrimati G. Durgabai, Shri L. Krishnaswami Bharathi, Shri U. Srinivasa Mallayya Shri Mihir Lal Chattopadhvay, Dr. P. S. Deshmukh, Shrimati Renuka Ray, Dr. P. K. Sen, Babu Ramnarayan Singh, Shri Kishorimohan Tripathi, Shrimati Ammu Swaminadhan, Pandit Balkrishna Sharma, Shri Khursheed Lal, Shri Brajeshwar Prasad, Shri B. Shiva Rao, Shri Baldeo Swarup, Shri V. C. Kesava Rao and the Mover, with instructions to report not later than the last day of the first week of the next session of the Assembly and that the number of members whose presence shall be necessary to constitute a meeting of the Committee shall be five."

Sir, it is a matter of great pity and also of great regret both for myself and I believe also for the members of the House that so important a measure as the codification of Hindu Law should have come for discussion before the House almost at the fag end of the session. We have, according to the arrangement announced by the Honourable speaker this morning, to conclude the debate on this motion by 7 O'clock from now, with an interval of half an hour. I think it my duty that within the limitations in which we are placed I should give more time to Members of the Legislature to express their views on the various points raised by this Bill and I should like to contribute my own mite to the fulfilment of this wish which I have expressed. The only way by which I could do it is to set an example by myself to make my opening speech as brief as

4 P.M.

*C.A. (Leg.) D., Vol. II, 26th February 1948, p. 1288.

*C.A. (Leg.) D., Vol. IV, 9th April 1948, pp. 3628-33.

I can possibly make. I regret it very much to have been required to come to that decision because this Bill is of such a vast character that if one were to expound it fully and thoroughly, and to explain its provisions as against the background of the existing Hindu Law, I have not the slightest doubt that such an effort would take not less than four or five hours. But that is impossible, and the House therefore, will forgive me if I confine myself to placing before it the most salient points which mark a departure from the existing law as we know it today.

Sir, this Bill, the aim of which is to codify the rules of Hindu Law which are scattered in innumerable decisions of the High Courts and of the Privy Council, which form a bewildering motley to the common man and give rise to constant litigation, seeks to codify the law relating to seven different matters. Firstly, it seeks to codify the law relating to the rights of property of a deceased Hindu who has died intestate without making a will, both female and male. Secondly, it prescribes a somewhat altered form of the order of succession among the different heirs to the property of a deceased dying intestate. The next topic it deals with is the law of maintenance, marriage, divorce, adoption, minority and guardianship. The House will see what is the ambit and the periphery of this Bill. To begin with the question of inheritance. Under this head the Bill enacts a new principle, at least for certain parts of British India. As many members who are lawyers in this House will know, so far as inheritance is concerned, the Hindus are governed by two different systems of law. One system is known as *Mitakashara* and the other is known as *Dayabhag*. The two systems have a fundamental difference. According to *Mitakshara,* the property of a Hindu is not his individual property. It is property which belongs to what is called a coparcenary, which consists of father, son, grandson and great grandson. All these people have a birth-right in that property and the property on the death of anyone member of this coparcenary passes by what is called survivorship to the members who remain behind, and does not pass to the heirs of the deceased. The Hindu Code contained in this Bill adopts the *Dayabhag* rule, under which the property is held by the heir as his personal property with an absolute right to dispose it of either by gift or by will or any other manner that he chooses.

That is one fundamental change which this Bill seeks to make. In other words, it universalises the law of inheritance by extending the *Dayabhag* rule to the territory in which the rule of the *Mitakshara* now operates.

Coming to the question of the order of succession among the heirs, there is also fundamental difference of a general character between the rule of the *Mitakshara* and the rule of the *Dayabhag*. Under the *Mitakshara* rule the agnates of a deceased are preferred to his cognates; under the *Dayabhag* rule the basis of heirship is blood relationship to the deceased and not the relationship based on cognatic or agnatic relationship. That is one change that the Bill makes; in other words, here also it adopts the rule of the *Dayabhag* in preference to the rule of the *Mitakshara*.

In addition to this general change in the order of succession to a deceased Hindu, the Bill also seeks to make four changes. One change is that the widow, the daughter, the widow of a pre-deceased son, all are given the same rank as the son in the matter of inheritance. In addition to that, the daughter also is given a share in her father's property; her share is prescribed as half of that of the son. Here again, I should like to point out that the only new change which this Bill seeks to make, so far as the female heirs are concerned is confined to daughter; the other female heirs have already been recognised by the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937. Therefore, so far as that part of the Bill is concerned, there is really no change in the Bill at all; the Bill merely carries the provisions contained in the Act to which I have made reference.

The second change which the Bill makes so far as the female heirs are concerned is that the number of female heirs recognised now is much larger than under either the *Mitakshara* or the *Dayabhag*.

The third change made by the (Bill is this that under the old law, whether the *Mitakshara* or the *Dayabhag*, a discrimination was made among female heirs, as to whether a particular female was rich or poor in circumstances at the death of the testator, whether she was married or unmarried, or whether she was with issue or without issue. All these consideration which led to discrimination in the female heirs are now abolished by this Bill. A woman who has a right to inherit

gets it by reason of the fact that she is declared to be an heir irrespective of any other considerations.

The last change that is made relates to the rule of inheritance in the *Dayabhag.* Under the *Dayabhag* the father succeeds before in preference to the mother; under the present Bill the position is altered so that the mother comes before the father.

So much for the order of succession of heirs to a deceased male Hindu. I now come to the provisions in the Bill which relates to intestate succession to females. As Members of the House who are familiar with Hindu Law will know, under the existing law the property held by a Hindu female falls into two categories; one is called her *stridhan,* and the other is called "woman's property". Taking first the question of *stridhan,* under the existing law *stridhan* falls into several categories; it is not one single category, and the order of succession to the *stridhan* of a female under the existing law varies according to the category of the *stridhan;* one category of *stridhan* has a different law of succession than another category and these rules are alike both as to *Mitakshara* as they are to the *Dayabhag.* So far as *stridhan* is concerned the present Bill makes two changes. The one change it makes is that it consolidates the different categories of *stridhan* into one single category of property and lays down a uniform rule of succession; there is no variety of heirs to the *stridhan* in accordance with the different categories of the *stridhan*—all *stridhan* is one and there is one rule of succession.

The second change which the Bill seeks to make with regard to the heirs is that the son also is now given a right to inherit the *stridhan* and he is given half the share which the daughter takes. Members will realise that in formulating this Bill and making changes in rules of succession, it is provided that while the daughter is getting half the share in the father's property, the son is also getting half the share in the mother's property so that in a certain sense the Bill seeks to maintain an equality of position between the son and the daughter.

Coming to the question of the "woman's estate", as members of the House will know under the Hindu Law where a woman inherits properly she gets only what is called a 'life estate' She can enjoy the income of the property, but she cannot deal with the corpus of the property except for legal necessity; the property must pass after

the death of the woman to the reversioners of her husband. The Bill, here again, introduces two changes. It converts this limited estate into an absolute estate just as the male when he inherits gets an absolute estate in the property that he inherits and secondly, it abolishes the right of the reversioners to claim the property after the widow.

An important provision which is ancillary to the rights of women to inherit property contained in this Bill is a provision which relates to *Dowry*. All members of the House know what a scandalous affair this *dowry* is; how, for instance, girls who bring enormous lot of property from their parents either by way of *dowry or stridhan* or gift are treated, nonetheless, with utter contempt, tyranny and oppression. The Bill provides in my judgment one of the most salutary provisions, namely, that this properly which is given as *dowry* to a girl on the occasion of her marriage shall be treated as a trust property, the use of which will inure to the woman and she is entitled to claim that property when she comes to the age of 18, so that neither her husband nor the relations of her husband will have any interest in that property; nor will they have any opportunity to waste that property and make her helpless for the rest of her life.

Coming to the provisions relating to maintenance, there is mostly nothing new in this part of the Bill. The Bill prescribes that the dependents of a deceased shall be entitled to claim maintenance from those who inherit his property either under the rules of intestate succession or who inherit the property under his will. There are 11 different kinds of dependants, enumerated in this Bill. I believe, at least speaking for myself, it is an unfortunate thing that even a concubine is included in the category of dependants, but there it is; it is a matter for consideration. The liability to maintenance is cast upon those who take the estate of the deceased. As I said, there is nothing very new in this part of the Bill.

There is another part of the Bill which is important and it relates to the rights of a wife to claim separate maintenance when she lives separate from her husband. Generally, under the provisions of the Hindu law, a wife is not entitled to claim maintenance from her husband if she does not live with him in his house. The Bill, however, recognises that there are undoubtedly circumstances where if the wife has lived away from the husband, it must be for causes beyond her control and

it would be wrong not to recognise the causes and not to give her separate maintenance. Consequently the Bill provides that a wife shall be entitled to claim separate maintenance from her husband if he is (1) suffering from a loathsome disease, (2) if he keeps a concubine, (3) if he is guilty of cruelty, (4) if he has abandoned her for two years, (5) if he has converted to another religion and (6) any other cause justifying her living separately.

The next topic to which I wish to make a reference concerns the question of marriage. The Code recognises two forms of marriages. One is called "sacramental" marriage and the other is called "civil" marriage. As members will know, this is a departure from the existing law. The existing Hindu law recognises only what is called "sacramental" marriage, but it does not recognise what we call a "civil" marriage. When one considers the conditions for a valid sacramental marriage and a valid registered marriage, under the Code there is really very little difference between the two. There are five conditions for a sacramental marriage. Firstly, the bridegroom must be 18 years old, and the bride must be 14 years old. Secondly, neither party must have a spouse living at the time of marriage. Thirdly, parties must not be within prohibited degree of relationship. Fourthly, parties must not be *sapindas* of each other. Fifthly, neither must be an idiot or a lunatic. Except for the fact that similarity of *sapindaship* is not a bar to a registered marriage, so far as other conditions are concerned, there is no difference between the sacramental marriage and the civil marriage. The only other difference is that the registered marriage must be registered in accordance with the provisions in the Bill while a sacramental marriage may be registered if parties desire to do so. Comparing the rules of marriage contained in the Bill and the existing law, it may be noticed that there are three differences which the Bill makes. One is this, that while the existing law requires identity of caste and sub-caste for a valid sacramental marriage, the Bill dispenses with this condition. Marriage under the Bill will be valid irrespective of the caste or sub-caste of the parties entering into the marriage.

Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava (East Punjab : General) If the marriage is between persons belonging to different castes, will it be valid?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Let me proceed with my speech. If the Honourable Member puts the question while making his speech, I shall reply to it.

The second provision in this Bill is that identity of *gotrapravara* is not a bar to a marriage while it is under the existing law. The third distinctive feature is this, that under the old law, polygamy was permissible. Under the new law it is monogomy which is prescribed. The sacramental marriage was a marriage which was indissoluble. There could be no divorce. The present Bill makes a new departure by introducing into the law provisions for the dissolution of marriage. Any party which marries under the new code has three remedies to get out of the contract of marriage. One is to have the marriage declared null and void; secondly, to have the marriage declared invalid; and thirdly, to have it dissolved. Now, the grounds for invalidation of marriage are two: One, if one party to the marriage had a spouse living at the time of marriage, then such a marriage will be null and void. Secondly, if the relationship of the parties fell within what is called the ambit of prohibited-degrees, the marriage could be declared null and void. The grounds for invalidation of the marriage are four. First, impotency. Second, parties being *sapinda.* Third, parties being either idiotic or lunatic. Fourth, guardian's consent obtained by force or fraud. In order not to keep the sword of dissolution hanging on the head, the Bill, in my judgment very wisely, has provided a limit to an action for invalidation. It provides that a suit for the invalidation of marriage must be filed within three years from the date of the marriage; otherwise the suit will be barred and the marriage will continue as though there was no ground for invalidity. The Bill also provides that even though the marriage may be invalidated and may be declared invalid by a court of Law, the invalidation of marriage will not affect the legitimacy of the children born and they would continue to be legitimate just the same.

Then coming to the question of divorce, there are seven grounds on which divorce could be obtained. (1) desertion, (2) conversion to another religion, (3) keeping a concubine or becoming a concubine, (4) incurably unsound mind, (5) virulent and incurable form of leprosy, (6) venereal diseases in communicable form and (7) cruelty.

Coming to the question of adoption, there again, most of the rules embodied in the Bill are in no way different from the rules obtaining under the present law. There are two new provisions in this part dealing with adoption. Firstly, under the Code, it will be necessary

for the husband if he wants to make an adoption to obtain the consent of his wife and if there are more than one, at least the consent of one of them. Secondly, it also lays down that if the widow wants to adopt, she can only adopt if there are positive instructions left by the husband authorising her to adopt and in order to prevent litigation as to whether the husband has, as a matter of fact, left instructions to his wife, the code provides that the evidence of such instructions shall be either by registered deed or by a provision in the will. No oral evidence would be admissible, so that chances of litigation are considerably mitigated. The Code also provides that the adoption may also be evidenced by registration. One of the most fruitful sources of litigation in this country is the question of adoption. All sorts of oral evidence is manufactured, concocted; witnesses are suborned; widows are fooled; they one day declare that they have made one adoption and subsequently they make an avowal that they have not adopted and in order that all this litigation may be put a stop to, the Code makes a salutary provision that there may be registration of adoption by a Hindu.

Then there is the question of minority and guardianship, the last subject which the Bill seeks to codify. There is nothing new in this part of the Code and, therefore, I do not propose to say anything so far as that part in the Bill is concerned.

As members will realize, the points which arise out of this Bill for consideration and which are new are these: First, the abolition of birth-right and to take property by survivorship. The second point that arises for consideration is the giving of half-share to the daughter. Thirdly, the conversion of the women's limited estate into an absolute estate. Fourthly, the abolition of caste in the matter of marriage and adoption. Fifthly, the principle of monogamy and sixthly the principle of divorce. I have sought to enumerate these points separately and categorically because I felt that in view of the limited time we have at our disposal, it would be of help to the Members of this House if I could point out what are the points of debate on which attention may be concentrated. These departures which are made in this Bill undoubtedly requires justification, but I think it would be a waste of time if at this stage undertook any defence of the departures enacted by this Bill. I propose to hear Honourable Members as to what they have to say on the points which I have enumerated and if I find that

it is necessary for me to enter upon a justification, I propose to do so in the course of my reply. Sir, I move.

Mr. Chairman : Motion moved :

"That the Bill to amend and codify certain branches of the Hindu Law, be referred to a Select Committee consisting of Shri Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, Dr. Bakshi Tek Chand, Shri M. Anantthasayanam Ayyangar, Shrimati G. Durgabai, Shri L. Krishnaswami Bharathi, Shri U. Srinivasa Mallayya, Shri Mihir Lal Chattopadhyay, Dr. P. S. Deshmukh, Shrimati Renuka Ray, Dr. P. K. Sen, Babu Ramnarayan Singh, Shri Kishorimohan Tripathi, Shrimati Ammu Swaminadhan, Pandit Balkrishna Sharma, Shri Khurshed Lal, Shri Brajeshwar Prasad, Shri B. Shiva Rao, Shri Baldeo Swarup, Shri V. C. Kesava Rao and the Mover, with instructions to report not later than the last day of the first week of the next session of the Assembly and that the number of members whose presence shall be necessary to constitute a meeting of the Committee shall be five."

* **Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya** (Madras : General): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I rise at an early moment in order to catch your eye in the hope that I shall have the ear of the House while having the eye of the Chairman. This is a very interesting piece of legislation which has been presented to this House, a piece of legislation for which the country has been whiting for long. This country having passed under the rule of foreigners for nearly a thousand years has not been able to effect that social progress which is incidental to changes in society in the world and which takes place imperceptibly by force of everchanging custom. Custom is a force which is generally patronized, appreciated and recognized by the rulers. Unfortunately, this country has had no kings for a long time to whose inspiring example the subjects could look up for any changes in society. In the West, even today, if a social change is required all that is to be done is for the King to initiate that change and all the people will follow as a matter of course. You might have heard the story of Edward the Eighth, who, when he was Prince of Wales, went to a far distant island and having heard from the people that their occupation was gone because of the change of fashions, asked what the fashion was which had ruined the occupation. They said formerly they were manufactures of straw hats and now straw hats had given place to felt hats and therefore, they had lost their occupation. The next day he appeared in public on a ceremonial occasion with a straw hat and

* C.A. (Leg.) D., Vol. IV, 9th April 1948, pp. 3633-39.

the straw hat industry was at once revived. That is the power of the king; he is not merely the political head of a State, but head of society, the exemplar, the mentor and the monitor. As such he evaluates the customs age long, traditional and hoary—sanctified by age and it lies in his power to change that custom one way or the other. But what has been our fate since the British rule had come into existence? So long as the Muslims were ruling this country, they copied our customs and we copied their customs; there was an inter-mixture and inter-currency of customs and therefore, some measures of social progress. But after the British came, when they came to be looked upon as untouchables and even unapproachables by the vast majority of the population of this country, the situation was that they were afraid to touch the customs of this country with the longest pole. They were afraid of any interference with the socio-religious structure which was a delicate structure almost like a chemical balance and bore the repercussions of the smallest change coming from abroad and from adventitious sources. They were afraid that such repercussions would be ruinous to the stability of their empire in this country and therefore, they adopted the plausible and seemingly reasonable altitude of not interfering with the religion or the custom of the land. In this manner the Judges of the High Courts always helped to register the custom as it had existed for long centuries behind, and never registered a change in the custom as marking a progress in society. Thus custom became petrified and when custom became petrified, progress became impeded altogether, and for a hundred and fifty years our society has not been able to make any progress. If social evils had been pointed out by missionaries at one stage they were so pointed out in a spirit of carping criticism rather than in a spirit of progressive helpfulness. And as time advanced and English education took root and as democracy spread its tentacles and got firm hold upon the affections of the people another change came into being. The very missionaries and clergymen who were so keen on educated Indians throwing off the trammels of their orthodoxy became suddenly conservative and critical of the drastic changes which the English educated people were taking to with a certain amount of irresponsible case. They began to inquire whether after all these people who were so readily taking to these changes meant to take to these changes or whether they were

simply throwing away by way of relaxation the rigid customs of age and of society. They did not like it because the spirit of reform is always destructive of their own power. In the encouraging of reform themselves they saw the dangers to their rule and the missionary saw at once that he was encouraging a certain amount of rebellious spirit in the nation. Now *Brahmoism* was looked upon as the saving factor in this country, but *Brahmoism* was thereupon condemned by the missionary because it provided a hailing house for the reform spirit of the nation. Thus the misssionary himself became conservative. Englishmen became conservative, custom became rigid, society became petrified and congealed and coagulated, as it were, in a chamber which was not wide or expansive, thus, we have suffered, so much so that the issue of a post-puberty marriage in the Punjab was declared illegitimate by the High Court. This was the last straw that broke the back of progressive society. Immediately, there was an attempt to break the bones of custom, by trying to reform the marriage law. Act 3 of 1870, popularly known as the *Brahmo* Marriage Act, required, however, a certain denial statement, "I repudiate that I am a Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian or a Parsee or a Jain or a Jew." This obnoxious declaration was associated with the provisions of that Act. Therefore, it did not become popular. Later on the *Sarda* Act came into being; fortunately it has set the seal of authority upon that piece of social reform which the heads of orthodoxy were imposing and were impeding. A new era has begun. The Indian National Congress which had started in 1885 had till 1919 associated with it as an ancillary and an auxiliary a social reform organisation which dealt with the social evils of the country and suggested various legislative measures also. But there was a non willingness on the part of the British Government to effect those legislative changes and as time progressed there was also an unwillingness on the part of society to accept the social reform at the hands of foreigners in this country.

Fortunately, Sir, today we have survived those times, I am glad I am alive to see the age when on the initiative of the National Government a progressive measure of reform, comprehensive in outlook, far-reaching in its result, medical in its nature, is being put forward, which embraces the rights of women in regard to inheritance, in regard to marriage, in regard to property, in regard to divorce, in

regard to personal freedom. And I hope, as time advances we shall have more and more of reforms in this direction to which this measure points today.

Let us start with the full rights that have been conferred upon the woman after the death of her husband. In our *Shastras* it has been briefly described that the woman is the bond slave of her father when she is young, to her husband when she is middle aged and to her son when she is a mother. Of course all epigrams, aphorisms, proverbs, platitubes and truisms are half truths. There is a core of truth about them. We sometimes find it useful to quote these things but there is a core of untruth also about them and we should try to understand the full significance of all these.

According to the measures before us, a woman will have property in her own right and be able to dispose of her property. I have been trying to see whether the Law Minister would explain when these rights would come into force. Suppossing after the passing of this measure a man dies and his widow inherits his property: what are her rights compared with the rights of a widow whose husband died one year ago? The latter possesses limited estates. What is the change sought to be introduced? Can widows with only limited estates convert those limited estates into full right estates with the right to give away, to mortgage, to sell and so on, irrespective of whether there is legal necessity in the interests of the family or not? That is a point which I have been trying to understand by turning up the pages of the measure before me but I have not been able to understand it. I dare say, in his reply the Mover of the Bill will be so good as to elucidate the point.

The 'rights' of the daughter is a matter on which I have been feeling very keenly. When speaking to English people or when discussing Indian conditions and society with savants and scholars coming from abroad, I have never been tired of praising my own system. If you wish to understand the basis of a system, or appraise any of its social customs or practices, you must not lake it in its present degenerate condition. But you must take it in all its pristine purity and glory. I look upon child marriage as a splendid institution as our ancients conceived it because they conceived it good for the average man and the average woman to be married. And this marriage is a

good thing because the child has to be grafted into another family and grafting should take place while the plant is young and not when the plant has become old. But then, the conception itself has changed. Now we live in an age when it is much more happy to be bachelors and criticise others' wives than to marry and beget children. Therefore, our ideals have changed and therefore, the principle of child marriage may not be binding upon us. Each one is at liberty to live his or her own life according to her or his pleasure and there is no obligation imposed by society and social conditions have changed. Under the circumstances we should not indeed be the victims of past tradition, past customs, past events.

But how shall we deal with the facts which exist at the present day: so many daughters and so many sisters are not merely vegetating but they are rotting in their homes. While we praise our systems to others, we cannot shut from our own eyes the fact that our sisters and daughters and other relations are rotting in their own homes unable to get any relief. Latterly I have suggested a love strike for our women. That is the only remedy which I have thought out and I have been able to think it out as a remedy directed against this custom. I read a book called "The Impregnable Women" while I was in the Ahmednagar Fort. There was a war in England and all the women wanted to resist the war. How could they resist? The men are greedy. The men are pugnacious and blood-thirsty. They want to fight. They want to measure the strength of the tiger and ape it them with the strength of the ape and tiger in others. Therefore, the women said : let us have a love strike. No young maiden would speak to her lover; no wife would speak to her husband; no mother would speak to her son. The men were boycotted. There was no social life between men and women until the war about to be declared was cancelled. They said they would not mix with these people. But, I will not push the matter further. I suggest that if in a village, or town, or mohalla, there is ill-treatment of a single woman, all our wives had better have a club and go away from our houses and live there for 24 hours and very soon the recalcitrant husband will be brought to his senses. All the men will bring their moral influence to bear upon this man and they will tell him: "What the hell are you doing? All our homes are

broken up and they will remain broken unless you take back your wife."

You may laugh now. But what else are you going to do? Are you going to prosecute the man? He will bring up his charges. Are you going to prosecute the wife? She will bring a number of charges. You should not enter into the quarrels between husband and wife. Once I found a husband beating his wife. I went and interfered. The woman turned round and came down on me like a wolf on the fold. She said: "It is my husband who is beating me. Who the hell are you to interfere?" Therefore, it is not possible for you easily to interfere in domestic affairs. After all the *Kowravas* and *Pandawas* when they fought, they used to say : "we are 100 against 5 but against a third party they said we are 100 *plus* 5" So in these domestic quarrels both are against us when we meddle in their affairs. So if the daughter is to be happy she must be able to inherit property in her own right I find that the position of a wife is most obsequious. Her sister's son comes. Her brother comes. She wants to give them a good present. But the wife has to wait upon the goodwill of her husband in order to get even Rs. 5. After all this man has his moods. And he may be in a good mood or a bad mood. So she must have some properly which she can call her own. Would you wish her to get rid of some of her jewels? The idea is fantastic. No woman will sell away her jewellery even after her husband's death because after her husband's death that jewellery stands as the symbol of the unity of herself and her deceased spouse. I know it. I have spoken to many women.

Mr. Chairman : Does the Honourable Member want to speak for a longer time?

Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya : I am sorry. I was not looking at the time. I would like to continue.

Mr. Chairman : The House will now adjourn for half an hour and reassemble at Half Past Five of the Clock.

The Assembly then adjourned till Half Past Five of the Clock in the afternoon.

conclusion that there ought to be no area which ought to be exempt from the operation of this Code. Consequently they deleted the provision.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : In the interests of uniformity.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I do not know whether it was done rightly or wrongly; that is a matter which the house will consider at a later stage.

Pandit Mukut Bihari Lal Bhargava (Ajmer-Merwara): May I ask whether the honourable speaker was dissenting from that view ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I will dissent at a later stage perhaps. I have no empty mind but I have still an open mind.

Shri H. V. Kamath (C. P. and Berar: General): Not a vacant mind !

Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava : On every question I hope.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Sir, in the ordinary course a speech of the sort which I have made is generally regarded not only appropriate but sufficient for the occasion. But it would be futile on my part to disguise the fact that there is a section—if not a large section, a section in the house—which feels a certain amount of compunction over certains parts of the Bill. Neither can I disguise from myself the fact that outside the House there are many people who are not only interested in the Bill but, if I may say so, very deeply concerned about it. I therefore think that it is only right, if you will permit me, to add a few general observations with regard to the points of controversy which I have noticed in several newspapers which I have been persuing ever since the Bill has been on the anvil. I will take this matter also part by part and section by section. I will deal only with what I regard have been considered as points of controversy. Let me take marriage and divorce. Here I find that there are three points of controversy.—The first point of controversy is abolition of castes as a necessary requirement for a valid marriage; the second point of controversy is the prescription of monogamy; and the third point of controversy is permission for divorce.

I will take the first point of controversy, namely—abolition of caste restrictions. So far as this Bill is concerned, what it does is to arrive at a sort of compromise betweeen the new and the old. The Bill says that if member of a Hindu community wants to follow the orthodox system which requires that a marriage shall not be valid unless the

bride and bridegroom belong to the same *varna,* the same caste or the same sub-caste, there is nothing in this Code which can prevent him from giving effect to his wishes or giving effect to what he regards as his *dharma.* In the same way if one Hindu who is a reformist and who does not believe in *varna,* caste or sub-caste, chooses to marry a girl outside his *varna,* outside his caste, outside his sub-caste , the law regards his marriage also as valid. So far as the marriage law is concerned there is therefore no kind of imposition at all. The *vydhikas,* the orthodox, are left free to do what they think is right according to their *dharma.* The reformers who do not follow *dharma* but who follow reason, who follow conscience, have also been left to follow their reason and their conscience.

Shri Mahavir Tyagi (U. P. : General): Are they permitted to marry outside their religion also if their conscience directs them in that manner?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Well, we will have another Bill for that. I do not know whether my honourable friend Mr. Tyagi is unmarried. If he is I will hurry it up.

Shri Mahavir Tyagi : I want to make way for others.

The **Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :** Consequently, what will happen in Hindu society so far as marriage law is concerned if there will be a competition between the old and the new. And we hope that those who are following the new path will win subsequently. But, as I say, if they do not, we are quite content to allow two parallel systems of marriage to be operative in this country and anyone may make his choice. There is no violation of a *shastra,* no violation of a *smriti* at all.

With regard to monogamy it may be that it is a new innovation. But I must point out that I do think that any Member in this house will be able to point out having regard to customary law or having regard to our *shastras* that a Hindu husband had at all times an unfettered, unqualified right to polygamy. That was never the case. Even today, in certain parts of South India there are people who follow this, a section of the Nattukottai Chettiyars—the case has been reported in the Reports of the Privy Council itself, I am not depending on mere heresay evidence—but among the Nattukottai Chettiyars there is a custom that a husband cannot marry a second wife unless he obtains the consent of his wife. Secondly, when a consent is obtained, he must allot to her certain property which I think in the Tamil language

is called *moppu*. That property becomes her absolute property so that if after her consent the husband marries and ill-treats her, she has a certain amount of economic competence in her own hands to lead an independent life. I cite that as an illustration to show that there has not been an unqualified right for polygamy.

A second illustration wliich I would like to give would be from the Arthashastra of Kautilya. I do not know how many Members of the House have perused that book, I suppose many of them have. If they have, they will realise that the right to marry a second wife has been considerably limited by Kautilya. In the first place, no man can marry for the first ten or twelve years because he must be satisfied that the woman is not capable of producing children. That was one limitation. The second limitation imposed by Kautilya on the right of second marriage was that the husband was to return to the woman all the *stridhan* that she had acquired at the time of marriage. It is only under these two conditions that Kautilya's Arthashastra permitted a Hindu husband to marry a second time.

Thirdly, in our own country, in the ligislation that has been passed in various Provinces, monogamy has been prescribed. For instance in the *marumakkathayam* and the *aliyasanthanam* law both of them prescribe monogamy as a rule of marital life. Similarly, with regard to the recent legislation that has been passed in Bombay or in Madras, similarly in Baroda, the law is the law of monogamy.

I hope the House will see from the instances I have given that we are not making any very radical or revolutionary change. We have precedent for what we are doing, both in the laws that have been passed by various States in India, also in the ancient *shastras* such as Kautilya's Arthashastra. If I may go further, we have got the precedent of the whole world which recognises monogamy as the most salutary principle so far as marital relations are concerned.

Shri Deshbandhu Gupta (Delhi) : What about the Mohammadan Law?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : We shall come to Mohammadan law when we discuss the Mohammadan law.

Coming to the question of divorce, there again I should like to submit to the House that this is in no way an innovation. Everybody in this House knows that communities wliich are called *shudra* have customary divorce and what is the total of what we call *shudra* ? Nobody has ever probably made any calculation as to the total number of *shudras* who go to compose the Hindu society, but I have not the

slightest doubt in my mind that the *shudras* form practically 90 per cent of the total population of the Hindus. What are called the Regenerated classes probably do not fill more than ten per cent of the total population of this country, and the question that I want to ask of honourable Members is this: are you going to have the law of the 90 per cent of the people as the general law of this country, or are you going to have the law of the 10 per cent of the people being imposed upon the 90 per cent ? That is a simple question which every Member must answer and can answer.

So far as the 'regenerated' classes are concerned there was a time, if one refers for instance to the time when the Narada *smriti* or the Parashara *smriti* were written, when the *smritis* recognised that a woman can divorce her husband when he has abandoned her, when he died, when he has taken *parivrija,* and she was entitled to have a second husband. Consequently, it may be that at a later stage I shall read to you some extracts from your *shastras* to show. (*An honourable member:* "Your *shastras*"). Yes, because I belong to the other caste.

I shall read the extracts to show that what has happened in this country is that somehow, unfortunately, unnoticed, unconsciously, custom has been Allowed to trample upon the text of the *shastras* which were all in favour of the right sort of marital relations. My submission, therefore, to the house is that so far as any new principles have been introduced in the law of marriage or divorce, whatever has been done is both just and reasonable and supported by precedent not only of our *shastras* but the experience of the world as a whole.

With regard to adoption, there are again three points of controversy. One point of controversy with regard to adoption is this, that like the old Hindu law we do not make similarity or identity of caste a requisite for a valid adoption. We follow the same rule that we have followed with regard to marriage. Here again, I may say that if a *Brahmin* wants to adopt a *Brahmin* boy, he is free to do so. If a *Kayasth* wants to adopt a *Kayasth* boy, he is free to do so. If a *Shudra* wants to adopt a boy of his own community he is free to do so. If a Brahmin is so enlightened as not to adopt a boy belonging to his own community but adopts a *Shudra,* he is also permitted to do so. There is therefore no kind of imposition.

Seth Govind Das (C. P. and Berar: General): Why do you consider such a Brahmin enlightened ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Well, I do not know. From my point of view certainly he is enlightened; from your point of view he may be a very dark man, but that is a difference of opinion.

With regard to the question of the limitation on the right of an adopted son to challenge all alienations made by the widow before adoption, I do not think that there can be any controversy at all. There is no reason why we should continue the notion that a boy when adopted becomes the son of the adopted father right from the time when the adopted father died. This is a pure fiction. It has no value at all. It is not merely a fiction; it is a fiction which gives rise to tremendous litigation and tremendous difficulties. It is therefore right that the adoption should be simultaneous with the vesting of the property. I do not think any member of the House will think that this is a proposition which we ought not to accept at this stage. (*Shri B. Das:* "We all accept".)

Similarly, as I have stated, the limitation upon the right of a boy who is adopted to divest the mother completely and to make her nothing more than a dependant waiting for such maintenance as the adopted boy may give, I do not think that there is any member of the House who will think that such a situation can be justified on any ground whatsoever. I think it is right that we preserve the right of adoption which the orthodox community cherishes so much, but, Sir, I do not understand why there should be adoption. Most of us who make adoptions have no name to be recorded in history. Personally, I myself certainly would not like my name to go down in history, because my record is probably very poor. I am an unusual member of the Hindu community. But there are many who have no records to go down and I do not understand why they should indulge in adopting a son—a stupid boy, uneducated, without any character—not knowing his possibilities and fastening him and fathering him upon a poor woman, whom he can deprive of every property that she possessed. Therefore, my submission is this, that if you do want to cherish your old notions with regard to adoption at any rate make this provision that the adopted boy does not altogether deprive the mother of the property which is her mainstay. I do not think that that limitation can be at all a point of controversy.

With regard to the question of the abolition of customary adoption, I would like to say two things. There is a general argument which the House will be able to appreciate. It is this. A Code is inconsistent with customary law. That is a fundamental proposition. If you allow a Code to remain and at the same time permit custom to grow and custom to plead against the Code, there is no purpose in having a

Code at all, because a custom can always eat into the Code and make the Code *null and void.* With regard to this particular matter of customary adoption such as *Krithrim* adoption, *Godha* adoption and *Dwaimushayan* adoption, my submission is this, that these are really not adoption at all. As the Privy Council in one of its rulings has definitely stated, adoption is purely a religious affair. The getting of property by the adopted son is a secondary matter. He may get property, he may not get property, and even though he may not get property his adoption from a religious point of view may be valid. Therefore, my submission is this, that all these customary adoptions are nothing else but devices to keep property within the two families which enter into this bargain, and in my judgement, since we have passed the Constitution and included in the Directive Principles one article saying that the State should take steps not to allow property being concentrated in the hands of one or a few, such devices like the *Dwaimushayan* where two parties merely agree to share the property and keep it with them ought not to be tolerated. Besides, there is no reason why parties who want to make a genuine adoption should not conform to the rules and regulations regarding the *Dattaka* adoption which is permitted by the law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is now one o'clock. The honourable Minister may continue after Lunch.

The Assembly then adjourned for Lunch till half Past Two of the Clock.

The Assembly re-assembled after Lunch at Half Past Two of the Clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker (Shri M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar) in the Chair.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I want not to take up the points of controversy relating to the topic of co-parcenary law. The question is raised: Why does the Bill wish to seek to abolish the co-parcenary which is prescribed by what is called the Mitakshara law? Now, Sir, having applied my mind in the best way I can for the proper exposition of this subjects, I think this is a question which required to be considered from three different points of view. One is how large a volume of property is included within the ambit of what is called co-parcenary property. If the volume that is comprised

within what is called co-parcenary property is a very large part of the property which a man in these days holds, then no doubt some serious attention will have to be paid to this question. Therefore, that is the first aspect of the question that one has to examine.

The second aspect that we have to consider with regard to the retention of what is called co-parcenary property is whether any coparcener had individually the right to alienate property. Thirdly, whether any cop-parcener has a right in himself to break up the coparcenary. Obviously, if the property included within the class of property called co-parcenary property is a small part of the property, different questions will arise. Similarly, if any co-parcener, under the present existing Hindu law, has already got the right to alienate his share in the property, then obviously, the question whether this law or this Bill is abrogating co-parcenary property would stand on a different footing. Similarly, if under the existing Hindu law a coparcener has an inherent right to break up a co-parcenary, then my submission is that the question that this Bill breaks up the co-parcenary becomes very much less momentous than is thought of by most members of the House as well as people outside.

Let me therefore take the first question : What is the extent of the non-co-parcenary property which a co-parcener may hold, notwithstanding the fact that he is a member of the co-parcenary ? Now, my friends, who have paid attention to this subject and know what the position is under the Hindu law, will know that there is no disqualification upon a co-parcener to hold separate property while he continues to be a co-parcener. A co-parcener may have capacity to hold two different sorts of property—property which belongs to the co-parcenary and property which does not belong to the coparcenary, but belongs to himself and does not go, by what is called survivorship.

Let me give the House some idea of the extent and nature of the property which a co-parcener can hold, although he is a co-parcener. I have taken from the existing text books on the Hindu law, the following categories of property which a co-parcener can hold, notwithstanding the fact that he is a co-parcener. Firstly, property inherited by a hindu from a person other than his father, grand-father and great grand-father. If a Hindu gets property from a person who is not his father, grand-father or great grand-father, that property is

in his hand and is separate property and does not belong to the coparcenary. Secondly, property inherited by him from his maternal grand father, thirdly gift of ancestral moveables made to him by his father and fourthly property granted by government to an individual who is a member of the co-parcenary becomes his personal property and not the property of the co-parcenary. Then fifthly we have ancestral property lost to the family and recovered without the aid of the family property. That also, although originally co-parcenary property, becomes his private property. Then sixthly, there is the income from separate property and purchases made from the income of such property. They are also private property. 7, share of a co-parcener by partition if he has not male issue. 8, property held by a sole surviving co-parcener when there is no widow with the power to adopt. 9, separate earning of a member of a joint family co-parcenary and 10, gains of learning. Such vast amount of property included in these 10 categories is today under the Mithakshara law the private property of a co-parcener. It does not become the property of the co-parcenary.

Let me illustrate this by one plain illustration. There are hundreds and hundreds of clerks in our Secretariat, some drawing small salaries, some drawing huge salaries more than the salaries of the Members of the Cabinet—Rs. 4,000 (Honourable Members : "Clerks ? Are they clerks ?") I mean officers. In a certain sense they are glorified clerks.

The point I want to put to the house is this : that such large income as gains of learning, which come up in individual cases to Rs. 4,000, if there was a joint family in the true sense of the word, ought to go to the joint family for the joint maintenance of that family. What happens ? Under the Gains of Learning Act passed only a few years ago, this very Assembly, not I mean the Members, passed a law that such gains of learning, which form, as I say, the principal part of the income of a joint family and which a member is enabled to earn by reason of the education that was given to him out of the family income, have now been made his personal and private income. My submission to the House is this : when so large a property, as I have mentioned, included in these ten different categories have already been made in modification of the original laws of Mitakshara private property, what is the balance of property that is left which can be said to comprise the co-parcenary property ? My submission is that really very, very small volume of property is left to comprise within

what is called the co-parcenary. Let me take the other question. It is said that the co-parcenary—I hope Members understand that coparcenary is something very narrow and very limited and it is not the same thing as a joint family, which is quite a different matter—system enables the Hindus to preserve the property, to retain it, that there can be no break-up, there can be no squandering of money so to say on the part of any member of the family. A question that I want to put to the House is this : Is it true under the existing law of the Mitakshara that this property cannot be alienated, cannot be squandered ? The answer is completely in the negative. Let me give you one or two illustrations. I am taking the case of the father. The father can alienate joint property for antecedent debt. All that the father has to do is to first of all create a debt, say one thousand or two thousand rupees on a personal promissory note. Subsequently, after six months he becomes entitled to sell the whole of the co-parcenary property, if that becomes necessary for the purpose of meeting that antecedent debt. Now, a submission that I want to make to the House is this : Does the lodgment of such enormous power in the hands of a father to sell the property for purely antecedent and personal debts ? I want the house to bear in mind that the Mitakshara law makes a distinction between the father and the manager so far as the alienation of property is concerned. True a manager cannot alienate a property belonging to the co-parcenary unless and until it is proved that there is a family necessity for which alienation is necessary. But with regard to the father, there is no such obligation at all. A father can create a debt personally for himself and he becomes entitled to alienate that property for a purely personal debt which has not been incurred for the pruposes of the family. The only limitation that is imposed upon the right of the alienation of the father under the Mitakshara law is that the debt must not be impious, must not be for an immoral purpose and if it is not immoral, then the father can alienate the whole of the property of the co-parcenary. There is no limit at all.

Similarly, take the case of the son. It is also under the Mitakshara law within the competence of a son to demand the partition of the family property at any time he likes. I could have well understood the argument for the conservation of the co-parcenary property if the rule of Hindu Law was that no co-parcener was entitled to alienate the property, that the property must remain the property of the coparcenary, but that is not the case. The root of dissolution, the root

of destruction of the co-parcenary property is in the co-parcenary itself, because it is the co-parcenary law that gives a vested right, a right from the very birth to demand partition of the property and disrupt the whole of the society.

Thirdly, even if a son does not alienate his property, he can create a debt on the property for his own personal pruposes and the creditor who has advanced that money under Mitakshara law has a perfect right to sue for the partition of the co-parcenary in order to recover his debt. A stranger, therefore, under the Mitakshara law has a right to break up the co-parcener. I would like to ask my honourable friends, who are worried about this matter, where a large part of the estate, of the assets lies outside the co-parcenary property and so far as the co-parcenary property is concerned, the father has a right to alienate without any kind of limitation except the immorality of the debt, the son has a right to break up the property at any time he likes and the son has a right to create a charge on the property enabling the creditor to sue for partition, is it something which might be called a solid system, which is fool-proof and knave-proof ? My submission is this, that the co-parcenary property law as it stands, contains within itself the elements of disruption. Therefore, the Bill is doing nothing very radical in saying that the share shall be held separately. As we all know to-day the condition is such that everybody wants to live separately. The moment a father dies, the sons claim that there shall be a legal recognition to facts, as they exist to-day. There is nothing that is radical at all in this part of the Bill.

Of course, I should say one thing which I think is generally not realized. I started by saying that a distinction has to be made between co-parcenary and joint family. This Bill while it does away with coparcenary, maintains the joint family. It does not come in the way of the joint family being maintained. The only thing is that the joint family in the Mitakshara law will be on the same footing and of the same character as the joint family under the Dayabhaga law. It must not be supposed that because the mitakshara law docs not prevail in Bengal that there is no joint family. There is a joint family. The only distinction will be that the members of the joints family instead of holding their rights as joint tenants, will hold them as tenants in common. That will be the only distinction that will be between the existing law in the Mitakshara and the future law in the Mitakshara.

Now, I come to woman's property. I do not know how many members of this house are familiar with the intricacies of this subject.

So far as I have been able to study this subject, I do not think that there is any subject in the Hindu Law which is so complicated, so intricate as the women's property (An honourable Member: "As the woman herself ") : As the woman herself. If you ask the question, what is *stridhan,* before answering that question, you have to ask another question and find an answer for it. You must first of all ask, 'is she a maiden' or 'is she a married woman'. Because what property is *stridhan* and what property is not *stridhan* depends upon the status of the woman. Certain property is *stridhanam* if she has obtained it while she is a maiden; certain property is not *stridhan* if she has obtained it after marriage. Consequently, if you ask the question what is the line of inheritance to the *stridhan,* you have again to ask the question whether the *stridhan* belongs to a maiden or the *stridhan* belongs to a married woman. Because, the line of succession to the *stridhan* of a maiden is quite different from the line of succession to the *stridhan* belonging to a married woman. When you come to the question of succession to married woman's property, you have again to ask the question, does she belong to the Bengal School or does she belong to the Mitakshara School. If you ask the question whether she belongs to the Mitakshara school, you will never be able to find a definite answer unless you probe further and ask whether she belongs to the Mithila School or the Benares School or some other School. This is a most complicated subject. At the same time, I should like honourable members to bear two things in mind. One is this : so far as women's property is concerned., generally speaking, it falls into two categories. One category is called her *stridhan* and the other is called widow's property. The latter property is property which she inherits from a male member of her family, and according to the existing law property which she owns only during her life time and subsequently that property passes to the reversioners of the male heir. That is the position.

Therefore, so far as women's property is concerned, we have two different sorts of inheritance and two different sets of property, *stridhan* property and widow's property. The heirs to *stridhan* property are quite different and distinct from the heirs to the property she inherits from a male member. The question, therefore, we have to consider in codifying this particular branch of the Hindu Law is this. Are you going to maintain the two principal divisions which exist at present, namely, *stridhan* property and widow's property? Secondly, are you going to maintain the double line of succession; one line of succession

for the *stridhan* property and another line of succession for widow's property? These are the two principal questions which arise when one begin to codify this law. The Committee came to the conclusion that so far as codification was concerned, its purpose would be defeated if we allow the present chaos to continue. We must either decide that a woman will not be entitled to have absolute property or we must decide that a woman should have absolute property. We must also decide what should be the line of heirs for a woman: whether they should be uniform or they should be different. The Committee came to the conclusion that so far as right to property is concerned, there should be uniformity and uniformity should recognise that the woman has absolute property.

I know a great deal of the argument that is always urged against women getting absolute property. It is said that women are imbecile; it is said that they are always subject to the influence of all sorts of people and consequently, it would be very dangerous to leave women in the world subject to the influences of all sorts of wily men who may influence them in one way or another to dispose of property both to the detriment of themselves as well as to the detriment of the family from which they have inherited the family property. The view that, the Committee has taken is a very simple one. In certain matters or certain kinds of property which is called *stridhan* property the Smritis are prepared to invest woman with absolute right. There can be no question at all that a woman has an absolute right over her *stridhan* property. She can dispose it of in any way she likes. My submission to the House is this. If the woman can be trusted to dispose of her *stridhanam* property in the best way she likes, and nobody has ever raised an argument for the obliteration of that rule of Mitakshara, the burden of proof lies upon the opponents who say that the other part of the property, namely, widow's estate, which the woman has inherited, should not become her absolute property. It is they who must prove that while the women are competent to dispose of a certain part of the property which they possess, they are not competent to dispose of a certain other part. The Committee, on a very careful examination, failed to find a satisfactory solution of this dilemma. The Committee, in my judgement, very rightly, came to the conclusion that if in certain cases women were competent and intelligent to sell and dispose of their property, they must be held to be competent in respect of the disposal of the other property also. That is the reason why the Committee have made this rule that women should now possess absolute property.

The other question that arises on this issue, namely women's property is the share of the daughter. I know it would be a very great under-statement to say that this is a ticklish question; it is a very anxious question. There are many people in this world, in India today, both orthodox and unorthodox who cannot help producing daughters; they do. I do not know what would happen to this world if daughters were not born. At the same time, they do not want to extend to the daughter the same love and affection which a parent is bound to extend both to the male and female issue. But, I am not going to use any such high level of argument in favour of the proposition which has been enunciated by the Select Committee; I am going to speak on a much lower tone. The first thing that. I would like to address myself to this house is this. The inclusion of the daughter among the heirs is not an innovation which is made by this Committee. Honourable members who are familiar with the law of inheritance as it prevails both under the Mitakshara and Dayabagha, I am sure, will admit that the daughter is included by both of them under what is called the compact series. As members will know, Hindu heirs are divided into several.categories. The first category, is called, compact series. After that, there is a series of heirs spoken of as *Sapindas,* then comes *samanodaks.* After that comes the *bandhus. Bandhus* are divided into three categories : *Atma bandhus,* Pitru *bandhus* and Matru *bandhus.* The compact series is really a special class of heirs which does not conform strictly to the basic principles of heirship surrounded round *gotraja, samanodaka* and *bandhus,* because it is a mixed category. It is a category which is based on double foundation. It is based on propinquity; it is also based on religious efficacy. They do not conform to any of the criteria which have been laid down for determining the categories of *sapindas, samanodakas* and *bandhus.*

If you take both the laws, the Mitakshara as well as the Dayabhaga, you will see that the daughter is included within the category known as compact series. The only distinction between the Mitakshra and the Dayabhaga is this. According to the Dayabhaga the necessary element in heirship is the capacity to offer oblation. Consequently the Dayabhaga makes a rule between a daughter who is unmarried, a daughter who is married, a daughter who is married but has a son, and a daughter who is a widow. They give preference to a daughter who is married and has a son. Next to that they give preference to a daughter who is married. The unmarried daughter comes

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third. But it is within that category, the reason being that a daughter who is married and has a son, is ready there to offer oblation, because her son can offer oblation. A daughter who is unmarried, has no son, and therefore his possibility of offering an oblation does not exist. That is why she has been kept down. But the point I want to emphasize, and which I want the House to bear in mind is that there is no innovation as such in the inclusion of the daughter in the category of compact series. She has always been there both according to the Mitakshara and according to the Dayabhaga. The only innovation which the Bill seeks to make is to raise the status of the daughter. Under the Bill she becomes simultaneous heir, along with the son the widow, the widow of the predeceased son, son of a predeceased son of a predeceased son, widow of a predeceased son of a predeceased son.

The point is this that originally, and particularly according to the Mitakshara Law, no female was entitled to any kind of share at all. This law was changed in the year 1937 whereby the widow of the deceased, the widow of the predeceased son and of his grandson and great-grandson—they were all made simultaneous heirs along with the son. The only omission that was made was in respect of the daughter. The government at that time was not prepared to lend its support to put the daughter on the same level as the widow and the widows of the predeceased son and the predeceased son's son. This is therefore the only innovation that the Bill makes. It merely raises it up in the order of heirs. It is not that for the first time she has been made an heir.

Now I come to the question of her share. As the Rau Committee has pointed out, and as many of the witnesses who know the Shastras have pointed out, that it is impossible to deny the fact that the daughter according to the Smritis was a simultaneous heir along with the son and that she was entitled to one-fourth share of her father's property. That has been accepted as a text from the Yagnavalkya and also from Manu. I once counted 137 Smritis and I do not know why our ancient Brahmins were so occupied in writing Smritis and why they did not spend their time doing something else it is impossible to say, assuming that that occupation was a paramount occupation of the day. There is no doubt that the two Smritikars whom I have mentioned—Yagnavalkya and Manu, rank the highest among the 137 who had tried their hands in framing Smritis. Both of them have stated that the daughter is entitled to one-fourth share. It is a pity that somehow

for some reason custom has destroyed the efficacy of that text: otherwise, the daughter would have been, on the basis of our own Smritis, entitled to get one-fourth share. I am very sorry for the ruling which the Privy Council gave. It blocked the way for the improvement of our law. The Privy Council in an earlier case said that custom will override law, with the result that it became quite impossible to our Judiciary to examine our ancient codes and to find out what laws were laid down by our Rishis and by our Smritikars. I have not the least doubt about it that if the Privy Council had not given that decision, that custom will override text, some lawyer, some Judge would have found it quite possible to unearth this text of Yagnavalkya and Munusmriti, and women today would have been enjoying, if not more, at least one-fourth of the share of their property.

The original Bill had raised the share of the daughter to one-half. My Select Committee went a step further and made her share full and equal to that of the son.

I am not entitled to disclose what happened at the Select Committee and how this provision came to be made. I am perfectly .....

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Unanimously !

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Was it a compromise between twice the share of a son claimed and half the share provided in the Bill ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : It was not a compromise. My enemies combined with my enthusiastic supporters and my enemies thought that they might damn the Bill by making it appear worse than it was.

Shri. H. V. Kamath : Have you any enemies.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : However, this is the position, namely, so far as the daughter's share is concerned, the only innovation that we are making is that her share is increased and that we bring her in the line with the son or the widow. That also, as I say, would not be an innovation if you accept my view that in doing this we are merely going back to the text of the Smritis which you all respect.

I might also say that in discussing this question about the share of the daughter, myself, and the members of the Law Department examined every system of inheritance. We examined the Muslim system of inheritance : We examined the Parsi system of inheritance : We examined also the Indian Succession Act and the line of succession

that had been laid down and we also examined the British system of inheritance, and nowhere could we find any case where a daughter. was excluded from a share. There is no system anywhere in the world where a daughter has been excluded.

Now, Sir one question has been brought forth constantly—that the giving of the share to the daughter means disruption of the family. I must frankly confess that I cannot appreciate the force of that argument. If a man has twelve sons and one daughter, and if the twelve sons on the day of the death of the father immediately decide on partition and obtain a twelfth of the total property of the father, is the partition going to be much more worse, if mere was a daughter, the thirteenth, who also demanded a share ?

Twelve share or 12 fragments is not a better situation than 13 fragments. If you want to prevent fragmentation we shall have to do something else, not by the law of inheritance but by some other law, whereby property shall not be fragmented so as to become less useful from a national point of view for purposes of national production.

Shri T. A. Ramalingam Chettiar (madras : General): Is the Hindu Code applied to agricultural land ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: It is not. I am saying generally.

I think I have, so far as I know, exhausted what I have to say on the various points of controversy which I had seen raised both by members of this House as well as by the members of the public. I hope that the clarification which I have given on the various points will allay the fears of members who are not well disposed towards this measure. They will realise that this is in no sense a revolutionary measure. I say that this is not even a radical measure and I should like to draw the attention of the members of this House to one important fact, namely the consitution and composition of the Rau Committee. There were four members of that committee but I should like to point out that two of them who have signed the report are far from radical members of the Hindu community. My friend Mr. Gharpure, whom I have known for a long number of years, is one of the most conservative members I know .....

Shri H. V. Kamath : Politically or Socially ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Politically and socially also. In fact I have no hesitation in saying that he may on certain

occasions find it very difficult to touch me even with a barge pole. He is so conservative. My friend Mr. T. R. Venkatarama Sastri is no doubt a liberal but he is certainly not a radical so far as I know. If these people conservative in their attitude have signed the report I think we can take it for granted that the measure to which they have put their signature could not be revolutionary and certainly could not be destructive of the foundations of the Hindu Society. So far as I am concerned I am a very conservative person : Although some people may not accept that fact, I am indeed very conservative. All I say is that I am a progressive conservative and I should like to tell the House one important fact which I think every one of us must bear in mind, particularly the conservative members of this House. The great political philosopher Edmund Burke who wrote a big book against the French revolution because of its radicalism and revolutionism did not forget to tell his own countrymen who were very conservative, one very important truth. He said that those who want to conserve must be ready to repair and all I am asking of this house is this : that if you want to maintain the Hindu system, the Hindu culture, the Hindu society, do not hesitate to repair where repair is necessary. This Bill asks for nothing more than repairing those parts of the Hindu system which are almost become dilapidated.

Shri H. V. Kamath : Sir, on a point of reminder, the Honourable Dr. Ambedkar promised some citations from the Smrities. Will he keep promise ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R, Ambedkar : I shall do so at the end. Fortunately for me I have secured a copy of Mr. Dwarkanath Mitter's own book "Rights of Hindu Women". I was going to cite certain text, which show that the rights which the Vedas had given to women were taken by the Smrities in the meantime and some other smrities tried to restore those rights. I shall cite them in the course of my speech.

Shri Deshbandhu Gupta : Could the Honourable Minister enlighten the House as to the evidence which was produced before the Select Committee?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : As Honourable Members know two bodies came to us and asked for evidence to be taken. The Committee decided that their evidence be taken. One body came and one body sent in a written reply. That body was the Dharma Nirnaya Mandal. In general they are absolutely in agreement with the provisions contained in the Bill. The other gentleman who came obviously was not.

Statement
by
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in explanation of his
RESIGNATION

The House I am sure knows, unofficially if not officially, that I have ceased to be a Member of the Cabinet. I tendered my resignation on Thursday the 27th September to the Prime Minister and asked him to relieve me immediately. The Prime Minister was good enough to accept the same on the very next day. If I have continued to be a Minister after Friday the 28th, it is because the Prime Minister had requested me to continue till the end of the Session—a request to which I was, in obedience to constitutional convention, bound to assent.

Our Rules of Procedure permit a Minister who has resigned his office, to make a personal statement in explanation of his resignation. Many members of Cabinet have resigned during my tenure of office. There has been however no uniform practice in the matter of Ministers who have resigned making a statement. Some have gone without making a statement and others have gone after making a statement. For a few days I was hesitant what course to follow. After taking all circumstances into consideration I came to the conclusion that the making of a statement was not merely necessary, but it was a duty which a member who has resigned owes to the House.

The House has no opportunity to know how the Cabinet works from within, whether there is harmony or whether there is a conflict, for the simple reason that there is a joint responsibility under which a member who is in a minority is not entitled to disclose his differences. Consequently the House continues to think that there is no conflict among members of Cabinet even when as a matter of fact a conflict exists. It is, therefore, a duty of a retiring Minister to make a statement informing the House why he wants to go and why he is not able to continue to take further joint responsibility.

Secondly, if a Minister goes without making a statement, people may suspect that there is something wrong with the conduct of the Minister, either in his public capacity or in his private capacity. No Minister should, I think, leave room for such suspicion and the only safe way out is a statement.

Thirdly we have our newspapers. They have their age-old bias in favour of some and against others. Their judgements are seldom based on merits. Wherever they find an empty space, they are prone to fill the vacuum by supplying grounds for resignation which are not the real grounds but which put those whom they favour in a better light and those not in their favour in a bad light. Some such thing I see has happened even in my case.

It is for these reasons that I decided to make a statement before going out.

It is now 4 years, 1 month and 26 days since I was called by the Prime Minister to accept the office of Law Minister in his Cabinet. The offer came as a great surprise to me. I was in the opposite camp and had already been condemned as unworthy of association when the interim Government was formed in August 1946. I was left to speculate as to what could have happened to bring about this change in the attitude of the Prime Minister. I had my doubts. I did not know how I could carry on with those who had never been my friends. I had doubts as to whether I could, as a Law Member, maintain the standard of legal knowledge and acumen which had been maintained by those who had preceded me as Law Ministers of the Government of India. But I kept my doubts at rest and accepted the offer of the Prime Minister on the ground that I should not deny my cooperation when it was asked for in the building up of our nation. The quality of my performance as a Member of the Cabinet and as Law Minister, I must leave it to others to judge.

I will now refer to matters which have led me to sever my connection with my colleagues. The urge to go has been growing from long past due to variety of reasons.

I will first refer to matters purely of a personal character and which are the least of the grounds which have led me to tender my resignation. As a result of my being a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, I knew the Law Ministry to be administratively of no importance. It gave no opportunity for shaping the policy of the Government of India. We used to call it an empty soap box only good for old lawyers to play with. When the Prime Minister made me the offer, I told him that besides being a lawyer by my education and experience, I was competent to run any administrative Department and that in the old Viceroy's Executive Council I held two administrative portfolios, that of Labour and C.P.W.D., where a great deal of planning projects were dealt with by me and would

like to have some administrative portfolio. The Prime Minister agreed and said he would give me in addition to Law the Planning Department which, he said, he was intending to create. Unfortunately the Planning Department came very late in the day and when it did come I was left out. During my time, there have been many transfers of portfolios from one Minister to another. I thought I might be considered for any one of them. But I have always been left out of consideration. Many Ministers have been given two or three portfolios so that they have been overburdened. Others like me have been wanting more work. I have not even been considered for holding a portfolio temporarily when a Minister in charge has gone abroad for a few days. It is difficult to understand what is the principle underlying the distribution of Government work among Ministers which the Prime Minister follows. Is it capacity ? Is it trust ? Is it friendship ? Is it pliability ? I was not even appointed to be a member of main Committees of the Cabinet such as the Foreign Affairs Committee or the Defence Committee. When the Economic Affairs Committee was formed, I expected, in view of the fact that I was primarily a student of Economics and Finance, to be appointed to this Committee. But I was left out. I was appointed to it by the Cabinet, when the Prime Minister had gone to England. But when he returned, in one of his many essays in the reconstruction of the Cabinet, he left me out. In a subsequent reconstruction my name was added to the Committee, but that was as a result of my protest.

The Prime Minister, I am sure, will agree that I have never complained to him in this connection. I have never been a party to the game of power politics inside the Cabinet or the game of snatching portfolios which goes on when there is a vacancy. I believe in service, service in the post which the Prime Minister, who as the head of the Cabinet, thought fit to assign to me. It would have, however, been quite unhuman for me not to have felt that a wrong was being done to me.

I will now refer to another matter that had made me dissatisfied with the Government. It relates to the treatment accorded to the Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes. I was very sorry that the Constitution did not embody any safeguards for the Backward Classes. It was left to be done by the Executive Government on the basis of the recommendations of a Commission to be appointed by the President. More than a year has elapsed since we passed the Constitution. But the Government has not even thought of appointing the Commission. The year 1946 during which I was out

of office, was a year of great anxiety to me and to the leading members of the Scheduled Castes. The British had resiled from the commitments they had made in the matter of constitutional safeguards for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Castes had no knowing as to what the Constituent Assembly would do in that behalf. In this period of anxiety I had prepared a report* on the condition of the Scheduled Castes for submission to the United Nations. But I did not submit it. I felt that it would be better to wait until the Constituent Assembly and the future Parliament was given a chance to deal with the matter. The provisions made in the Constitution for safeguarding the position of the Scheduled Castes were not to my satisfaction. However, I accepted them for what they were worth, hoping that the Government will show some determination to make them effective. What is the position of the Scheduled Castes to-day ? So far as I see, it is the same as before. The same old tyranny, the same old oppression, the same old discrimination which existed before, exists now, and perhaps in a worst form. I can refer to hundreds of cases where people from the Scheduled Castes round about Delhi and adjoining places have come to me with their tales of woes against the Caste Hindus and against the Police who have refused to register their complaints and render them any help. I have been wondering whether there is any other parallel in the world to the condition of the Scheduled Castes in India. I cannot find any. And yet why is no relief granted to the Scheduled Castes ? Compare the concern the Government shows over safeguarding the Muslims. The Prime Minister's whole time and attention is devoted for the protection of the Muslims. I yield to none, not even to the Prime Minister, in my desire to give the Muslims of India the utmost protection wherever and whenever they stand in need of it. But what I want to know is, are the Muslims the only people who need protection? Are the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Indian Christians not in need of protection ? What concern has he shown for these communities ? So far as I know, none and yet these are the communities which need far more care and attention than the Muslims.

I could not contain within myself the indignation I have felt over the neglect of the Scheduled Castes by the Government and on one occasion I gave vent to my feelings at a public meeting of the Scheduled Castes. A question was asked, from the Hon'ble the Home Minister, whether my charge that the Scheduled Castes had not

*Editor regrets his inability to trace out this report and will welcome any assistance in this regard—*Ed.*

benefitted by the rule which guaranteed to them 12½ per cent representation was true. In answer to the question the Hon'ble the Home Minister was pleased to say that my charge was baseless. Subsequently for some reason—it may be for satisfying the qualms of his conscience—he, I am informed, sent round a circular to the various Departments of the Government of India asking them to report how many Scheduled Caste candidates had been recently recruited in Government service. I am informed that most Departments said in reply 'NIL' or nearly nil. If my information is correct, I need make no commentary on the answer given by the Hon'ble the Home Minister.

From my early childhood I have dedicated myself to the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes among whom I was born. It is not that there were no temptations in my way. If I had considered my own interests, I could have been anything I wanted to be and if I had joined the Congress I would have reached to the highest place in that organization. But as I said, I had dedicated myself to the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes and I have followed the adage which says that it is better to be narrow-minded if you wish to be enthusiastic about a cause which you wish to accomplish. You can therefore, well imagine what pain it has caused me to see that the cause of the Scheduled Castes has been relegated to the limbo of nothing.

The third matter which has given me cause, not merely for dissatisfaction but for actual anxiety and even worry, is the foreign policy of the country. Any one, who has followed the course of our foreign policy and along with it the attitude of other countries towards India, could not fail to realize the sudden change that has taken place in their attitude towards us. On 15th of August 1947 when we began our life as an independent country, there was no country which wished us ill. Every country in the world was our friend. Today, after four years, all our friends have deserted us. We have no friends left. We have alienated ourselves. We are pursuing a lonely furrow with no one even to second our resolutions in the U.N.O. When I think of our foreign policy, I am reminded of what Bismark and Bernard Shaw have said. Bismark has said that "politics is not a game of realizing the ideal. Politics is the game of the possible." Bernard Shaw not very long ago said that good ideals are good but one must not forget that it is often dangerous to be too good. Our foreign policy is in complete opposition to these words of wisdom uttered by two of the world's greatest men.

How dangerous it has been to us this policy of doing the impossible and of being too good is illustrated by the great drain on our resources made by our military expenditure, by the difficulty of getting food for our starving millions and by difficulty of getting aid for the industrialization of our country.

Out of 350 crores of rupees of revenue we raise annually, we spend about Rs. 180 crores of rupees on the Army. It is a colossal expenditure which has hardly any parallel. This colossal expenditure is the direct result of our foreign policy. We have to foot the whole of our Bill for our defence ourselves because we have no friends on which we can depend for help in any emergency that may arise. I have been wondering whether this is the right sort of foreign policy.

Our quarrel with Pakistan is a part of our foreign policy about which I feel deeply dissatisfied. There are two grounds which have disturbed our relations with Pakistan—one is Kashmir and the other is the condition of our people in East Bengal. I felt that we should be more deeply concerned with East Bengal where the condition of our people seems from all the newspapers intolerable than with Kashmir. Notwithstanding this we have been staking our all on the Kashmir issue. Even then I feel that we have been fighting on an unreal issue. The issue on which we are fighting most of the time is, who is in the right and who is in the worng. The real issue to my mind is not who is in the right but what is right. Taking that to be the main question, my view has always been that the right solution is to partition Kashmir. Give the Hindu and Buddhist part to India and the Muslim part to Pakistan as we did in the case of India. We are really not concerned with the Muslim part of Kashmir. It is a matter between the Muslims of Kashmir and Pakistan. They may decide the issue as they like. Or if you like, divide it into three parts; the Cease-fire zone, the Valley and the Jammu-Ladhak Region and have a plebiscite only in the Valley. What I am afraid of is that in the proposed plebiscite, which is to be an overall plebiscite, the Hindus and Buddhists of Kashmir are likely to be dragged into Pakistan against their wishes and we may have to face the same problems as we are facing today in East Bengal.

I will now refer to the Fourth matter which has a good deal to do with my resignation. The Cabinet has become a merely recording and registration office of decisions already arrived at by Committees. As I have said, the Cabinet now works by Committees.

There is a Defence Committee. There is a Foreign Committee. All important matters relating to Foreign affairs are dealt with by it. All matters relating to Defence are disposed of by the Defence Committee. The same members of the Cabinet are appointed by them. I am not a member of either of these Committees. They work behind an iron curtain. Others who are not members have only to take joint responsibility without any opportunity of taking part in the shaping of policy. This is an impossible position.

I will now deal with a matter which has led me finally to come to the decision that I should resign. It is the treatment which was accorded to the Hindu Code. The Bill was introduced in this House on the 11th April 1947. After a life of four years, it was killed and died unwept and unsung, after 4 clauses of it were passed. While it was before the House, it lived by fits and starts. For full one year the Government did not feel it necessary to refer it to a Select Committee. It was referred to the Select Committee on 9th April 1948. The Report was presented to the House on 12th August 1948. The motion for the consideration of the Report was made by me on 31st August 1948. It was merely for making the motion that the Bill was kept on the Agenda. The discussion of the motion was not allowed to take place until the February Session of the year 1949. Even then it was not allowed to have a continuous discussion. It was distributed over 10 months, 4 days in February, 1 day in March and 2 days in April 1949. After this, one day was given to the Bill in December 1949, namely the 19th December on which day the House adopted my motion that the Bill as reported by the Select Committee be taken into consideration. No time was given to the Bill in the year 1950. Next time the Bill came before the House was on 5th February 1951 when the clause by clause consideration of the Bill was taken. Only three days 5th, 6th and 7th of February were given to the Bill and left there to rot.

This being the last Session of the present Parliament, Cabinet had to consider whether the Hindu Code Bill should be got through before this Parliament ended or whether it should be left over to the new Parliament. The Cabinet unanimously decided that it should be put through in this Parliament. So the Bill was put on the Agenda and was taken up on the 17th September 1951 for further clause by clause consideration. As the discussion was going on the Prime Minister put forth a new proposal, namely, that the Bill as a whole may not be got through within the time available and that it was desirable to get a part of it enacted into law rather

than allow the whole of it to go to waste. It was a great wrentch to me. But I agreed, for, as the proverb says "it is better to save a part when the whole is likely to be lost". The Prime Minister suggested that we should select the Marriage and Divorce part. The Bill in its truncated 'form went on. After two or three days of discussion of the Bill the Prime Minister came up with another proposal. This time his proposal was to drop the whole Bill even the Marriage and Divorce portion. This came to me as a great shock—a bolt from the blue. I was stunned and could not say anything. I am not prepared to accept that the dropping of this truncated Bill was due to want of time. I am sure that the truncated Bill was dropped because other and more powerful members of the Cabinet wanted precedence for their Bills. I am unable to understand how the Benaras and Aligarh University Bills, how the Press Bill could have been given precedence over the Hindu Code even in its attenuated form ? It is not that there was no law on the Statute Book to govern the Aligarh University or the Benaras University. It is not that these Universities would have gone to wreck and ruins if the Bills had not been passed in this session. It is not that the Press Bill was urgent. There is already a law on the Statute Book and the Bill could have waited. I got the impression that the Prime Minister, although sincere, had not the earnestness and determination required to get the Hindu Code Bill through.

In regard to this Bill I have been made to go through the greatest mental torture. The aid of Party Machinery was denied to me. The Prime Minister gave freedom of Vote, an unusual thing in the history of the Party. I did not mind it. But I expected two things. I expected a party whip as to time limit on speeches and instruction to the Chief Whip to move closure when sufficient debate had taken place. A whip on time limit on speeches would have got the Bill through. When freedom of voting was given there could have been no objection to have given a whip for time limit on speeches. But such a whip was never issued. The conduct of the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, who is also the Chief Whip of the Party in connection with the Hindu Code, to say the least, has been most extraordinary. He has been the deadliest opponent of the Code and has never been present to aid me by moving a closure motion. For days and hours filibustering has gone on a single clause. But the Chief Whip, whose duty it is to economise Government time and push on Government Business, has been systematically absent when the Hindu Code has been under consideration in the House. I have never seen a case of a Chief Whip so disloyal to the Prime Minister and a Prime Minister so loyal to a disloyal Whip.

Notwithstanding this unconstitutional behaviour, the Chief Whip is really a darling of the Prime Minister. For notwithstanding his disloyalty he got a promotion in the Party organization. It is impossible to carry on in such circumstances.

It has been said that the Bill had to be dropped because the opposition was strong. How strong was the opposition ? This Bill has been discussed several times in the Party and was carried to division by the opponents. Every time the opponents were routed. The last time when the Bill was taken up in the Party Meeting, out of 120 only 20 were found to be against it. When the Bill was taken in the Party for discussion, 44 clauses were passed in about 3½ hours time. This shows how much opposition there was to the Bill within the Party. In the House itself there have been divisions on three clauses of the Bill—2, 3 and 4. Every time there has been a overwhelming majority in favour even on clause 4 which is the soul of the Hindu Code.

I was therefore, quite unable to accept the Prime Minister's decision to abandon the Bill on the ground of time. I have been obliged to give this elaborate explanation for my resignation because some people have suggested that I am going because of my illness. I wish to repudiate any such suggestion. I am the last man to abandon my duty because of illness.

It may be said that my resignation is out of time and that if I was dissatisfied with the Foreign Policy of the Government and the treatment accorded to Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes I should have gone earlier. The charge may sound as true. But I had reasons which held me back. In the first place, most of the time I have been a member of the Cabinet, I have been busy with the framing of the Constitution. It absorbed all my attention till 26th January 1950 and thereafter I was concerned with the Peoples' Representation Bill and the Delimitation Orders. I had hardly any time to attend to our Foreign Affairs. I did not think it right to go away leaving this work unfinished.

In the second place, I thought it necessary to stay on, for the sake of the Hindu Code. In the opinion of some it may be wrong for me to have held on for the sake of the Hindu Code. I took a different view. The Hindu Code was the greatest social reform measure ever undertaken by the Legislature in this country. No law passed by the Indian Legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it in point of its significance.

To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex which is the soul of Hindu Society untouched and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap. This is the significance I attached to the Hindu Code. It is for its sake that I stayed on notwithstanding my differences. So if I have committed a wrong it is in the hope of doing some good. Had I no ground for such a hope, for overcoming the obstructionist tactics of the opponents ? I would like in this connection to refer only to three of the statements made by the Prime Minister on the floor of the House.

On 28th November, 1949 the Prime Minister gave the following assurance. He said :

> "What is more, the Government is committed to this thing (Hindu Code). It is going through with it."
>
> * * * *
>
> "Government would proceed with that. It is for this House to accept a measure, but if a Government takes an important measure and the House rejects it, the House rejects that Government and the Government goes and another Government comes in its place. It should be clearly understood that this is one of the important measures to which the Government attaches importance and on which it will stand or fall."

Again on 19th December 1949, the Prime Minister said :

> "I do not wish the House to think in the slightest degree that we consider that this Hindu Code Bill is not of importance, because we do attach the greatest importance to it, as I said, not because of any particular clause or anything, but because of the basic approach to this vast problem in problems, economic and social. We have achieved political freedom in this country, political independence. That is a stage in the journey, and there are other stages, economic, social and other and if society is to advance, there must be this integrated advance on all fronts."

On the 26th September 1951 the Prime Minister said :

> "It is not necessary for me to assure the House of the desire of Government to proceed with this measure in so far as we can proceed with it within possibilities, and so far as we are concerned we consider this matter as adjourned till such time as the next opportunity—I hope it will be in this Parliament—offers itself.

This was after the Prime Minister had announced the dropping of the Bill. Who could not have believed in these pronouncements of the Prime Minster ? If I did not think that there could be a difference between the promises and performances of the Prime Minister the fault is certainly not mine. My exit from the Cabinet may not be a matter of much concern to anybody in this country. But I must be true to myself and that I can be only by going out. Before I do so I wish to thank my colleagues for the kindness and courtesy they have shown to me during my membership of the Cabinet. While I am not resigning my membership of Parliament I also wish to express my gratitude to Members of Parliament for having shown great tolerance towards me.

New Delhi,
10th October 1951

B. R. AMBEDKAR

18

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE HINDU WOMAN : WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT ?

In the journal of the Maha Bodhi for March 1950 there appeared an article on "The Position of Women in Hinduism and Buddhism" *by Lama Govinda. His article was a rejoinder to an article which had appeared in Eve's Weekly of January 21, 1950, and in which the Buddha was charged as being the man whose teachings were mainly responsible for the downfall of women in India. Lama Govinda did his duty as every Buddhist must in coming forward to refute the charge. But the matter cannot be allowed to rest there. This is not the first time such a charge is made against the Buddha. It is often made by interested parties who cannot bear his greatness, and comes from quarters weightier in authority than the writer an Eve's Weekly can claim. It is, therefore, necessary to go to the root of the matter and examine the very foundation of this oft repeated charge. The charge is so grave and so vile that the readers of the Maha Bodhi will, I am sure, welcome further examination of it.

Such a charge against the Buddha can be supported on two grounds only -

The first possible ground may be the reply which the Buddha is reported (in Chapter V - *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*) to have given to a question put to him by Ananda. It reads as follows :

"9. How are we to conduct ourselves, (asked Ananda)
with regard to womankind ?
As not seeing them, Ananda.
But if we should see them,
what are we to do ?
Not talking, Ananda.
But if they should speak to us,
Lord, what are we to do ?
Keep wide awake, Ananda."

* See Appendix—II.

There is no denying that the passage in question is to be found in the text of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* as published by the Oxford University Press. The point, however, is not whether the passage exists or not. The point is that if any argument is to be built upon this passage, is it not necessary to prove that the text is original and genuine and not a latter interpolation by the *Bhikkhus* ?

Any one who knows the central teachings of the Buddha is quite bewildered after reading the Sutta Pitaka as we find it now wrapped about by the mythical drapery, disfigured by additions of purely Brahmanic ideas entirely foreign to the original Buddhist thought and distorted by the twists and turns given to it by monastic ideas intended to enforce monastic ideals. So much so that one is inclined to join in wonder with Mrs. Rhys Davids[1], and ask :-

> "Where in these pages of (the *Sutta Pitaka)* is Gotama? How much of them, how little, is a blend of (it may be) original saying clearly or confusedly reproduced, of fillings by ages of successive narrators, of memory-schemes drawn up by teachers, not teachers of the multitude but of orally learning pupils, of efforts, often clumsy, by editors to set down in writing much that had long been more fluently told ? And all of them, narrators, teachers, editors, were men whose choice of ideals of life differed from that of the rest of the world, differed the more in proportion as they were sincerely not of the world as well as not in it. Through this distorting medium he has to read, and ask himself which sayings, put into the mouth of a certain accredited 'teacher and way-shower" of truth, are likely to have come from such a man as he is recorded to have been ?"

There is therefore nothing very extravagant in the suggestion that this passage is a later interpolation by the Bhikkhus. In the first place the Sutta Pitaka was not reduced to writing till 400 years had passed after the death of the Buddha. Secondly, the Editors who compiled and edited them were Monks

[1] : Preface (xiii) to Kindred Sayings, Vol. II.

and the Monk Editors compiled and wrote for the Monk. The statement attributed to the Buddha is valuable for a Monk to preserve his rule of celibacy and it is not unlikely for the Monk Editor to interpolate such a rule.

There are two other considerations which go to support the suggestion that this passage is a later interpolation.

(1) Firstly, from the Table given in the introduction to this *Sutta* (to be found on page 72 of the Digha Nikaya, part II, in the S.B.B. Series, by Davids) it will be noticed that great many of the passages which occur in this *Sutta* also occur in other *Suttas*. It is important to note that this passage does not occur in any other *Sutta* notwithstanding the fact that they contain so many other passages from this *Sutta*.

(2) Secondly, from page XXXVIII of the introduction to this *Sutta* (published in Vol. XI of the S.B.E. by Davids) it appears that there exists a Chinese version of this *Sutta*. But this Chinese text also does not contain this particular passage.

Let us go further and apply the test of probability. Was there any reason why Ananda should have asked such a question? Was it in keeping with the known relations of Buddha with women ? There is evidence to show that such a question could not have been asked by Ananda and that if such a question had been asked, the Buddha could not have given such a reply. The conduct of Ananda and of the Buddha toward women as reported in the *Pitakas* is so contrary to the possibility of such a question being raised and such an answer being given.

On the point as to whether there was any necessity for Ananda to ask such a question it is relevant to note that in the same Chapter of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta,* only a few *gathas* removed from those quoted above, the Buddha describes how sweet was Ananda and how he was loved by all. Out of them I quote below the two following *gathas*—

"16. Brethren, there are these four wonderful and marvellous qualities in Ananda.

If, brethren, a number of the brethren of the Order should come to visit Ananda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ananda should then preach the truth to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company of brethren is ill at ease, brethren, when Ananda is silent.

If brethren, a number of the sisters of the Order..... or of devout men, ... or of devout women, should behold him; and if Ananda should then preach the truth to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company of sisters is ill at ease, brethren, when Ananda is silent."

From this it is clear that it was usual for Ananda to meet women, not only sisters but devout women who were not members of the Order. He used to see them, meet them and talk to them. Why then should Ananda have asked such a question ? The Buddha knew that the women used to meet Ananda. He raised no objection before. Why should he have thought of interdicting and forbidding all contact with women ? The whole passage is so unnatural that it must be regarded as a later monastic interpolation.

There is another instance in the life of Ananda which stands in stark contrast with the passage in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutra*. As is well known, in the first *Sangiti* (Council) five complaints were made against Ananda. They were :—

(1) that he failed to ask which parts of the *Vinaya* were in the opinion of the Buddha the lesser parts for which he gave authority to the *Sangha* to alter and amend;

(2) that he stepped on the Robe of the Lord during retreat when sewing it;

(3) that he caused the body of the departed Lord to be saluted first by women so that it was soiled by their tears ;

(4) that he did not ask the Lord to live for a cycle, and

(5) that he was principally instrumental in getting women admitted to the *Sangha*.

To all these charges Ananda pleaded guilty. Whether he should have pleaded guilty or not is another matter. What is of interest is the third charge. For it has great relevance to the issue in question. Why did Ananda allow women to touch the body of the Master if the advice given by him as mentioned in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is true as a fact ? Would he so flagrantly and knowingly disobey the advice given by the Buddha a few minutes before?" The answer must be in the negative. What follows from this negative answer ? What follows is that the Buddha had not given such an advice as is alleged against him. For if he had given such an advice, Ananda could not have acted contrary to it. It therefore stands to reason that no such advice had been given by the Buddha.

Let us now consider the question from the side of the Buddha. Would it have been natural for the Buddha to give such a reply ? The answer to this question must depend upon Buddha's course of conduct towards women. Did the Buddha avoid meeting women as is suggested by the advice he is reported to have given to Ananda? Where are the facts ?

Two examples at once come to mind. One is that of Visakha. She was one of the eighty chief disciples of the Buddha with the title of "Chief of Alms-givers'. Did not Visakha at one time go to hear Buddha preach ? Did she not enter his monastery ? Did the Buddha act towards Visakha in the manner he directed Ananda to act towards women ? What did the *Bhikkhus* present at the meeting do? Did they leave the meeting?

The second instance that comes to one's mind is that of Amrapali of Vaisali. She went to see the Buddha and gave him and his monks an invitation for a meal at her house. She was courtesan. She was the most beautiful woman in Vaisali. Did the Buddha and the *Bhikkhus* avoid her ? On the other hand they accepted her invitation-rejecting the invitation of the Licchavis who felt quite insulted on that account- and went to her home and partook of her food.

Other examples are not wanting. The *Nandakovada Sutta*[1] tells of Mahaprajapati Gotami having brought five hundred alms-women with her to the Buddha when he was staying at Sravasti with a request that he should instruct them in the Doctrine and Discipline. Did the Buddha run away from them ?

The *Samyutta Nikaya*[2] reports that Kokanada, daughter of Pajjuna, when the night was far spent shedding radiance with her effulgent beauty over the whole *Mahavana,* came into the presence of the Buddha when he was staying at Vaisali.

The reports of frequent visits of Queen Mallika, wife of King Pasenajit, to the Buddha for religious instructions are scattered in the *Pitakas.*

From these instances it is clear that the Buddha did not shun women and women were not afraid of going to the Buddha.

It is true that the Buddha did advise[3] the Bikkhus not to make it a habit to visit families of lay disciples for fear of human weakness yielding to frequent contacts with women. But he did not forbid such visits nor did he express any disdain about women as such.

It is also true that the Buddha was dreadfully keen in maintaining celibacy. He was painfully aware of the fact that, to use his own words,[4] "Women doth stain life of celibacy". But what did he advise ? Did he advise the *Bhikkhus* to shun all contact with women ? Not at all. He never put any such interdict. Far from doing any such thing what he did was to tell the *Bhikkhus* that whenever they met any women, do *ye* call up the mother-mind, the sister-mind, or the daughter-mind[5] as the case may be *i.e.* regard a woman as you would your own mother, sister or daughter.

The second possible ground which an opponent of the Buddha can rely upon in support of the accusation is the opposition of the Buddha to women joining the *Sangha* and in making the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* (when he ultimately allowed it) subordinate to the *Bhikkhu Sangha.* Here again a further analysis of the situation is necessary. Why did the Buddha oppose the

[1] : Majjima Nikaya II. P. 309.

[2] : Vol. I P. 40.

[3] : Anguttara Nikaya III P. 190.

[4] : Samyutta Nikaya I. P. 53.

[5] : Kindred Saying IV, P. 68.

demand of Mahaprajapati to take *parivraja* (ordination) ? Did he oppose it because he was of opinion that women were a low class whose admission would lower the status of the *Sangha* in public esteem ? Or did he oppose it because he was of opinion that women intellectually and morally were incapable of realizing the ideal of His Doctrine and His Discipline? The second of these two questions was definitely put to the Buddha by Ananda in the course of the argument when he found the Buddha somewhat adamant. The Buddha gave an unequivocal answer leaving no room for doubt or dispute. He said that women were fully capable of realizing His Doctrine and His Discipline and that was not the reason why he refused their demand for taking *parivraja.* It is clear from this that the Buddha did not regard woman as inferior to man either in point of intellect or character. That he opposed the admission of women because he held them in low esteem and feared that they might lower the prestige of the *Sangha* is an argument which is hardly worth mentioning. For if that was his feeling he would never have admitted them at all.

To the argument that he made the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* subordinate to the *Bhikku Sangha,* the answer in question behind this arrangement there was no consideration as to superiority or inferiority, what lay behind this arrangement were consideration of purely practical character. In admitting women to be *Parivrajikas* (nuns) the Buddha had to face two questions. Should there be only one *Sangha* for men and women ? He decided to have two separate *Sanghas.* He was afraid that in a confraternity of men and women *Parivrajakas* the rule of celibacy would be completely lost. While therefore admitting women, he thought, it was necessary to use his own words, a dyke between them by creating two separate organisations. Having decided to create two separate organisations he was faced with another question. If there are to be two separate *Sanghas-* one for men and one for women- were they to be quite independent and separate organisations or was there to be some sort of inter-relation between the two ?

On the first issue no other decision was possible except that the women's *Sangha* should be separate from the men's *Sangha.*

This was an inevitable consequence which followed from the Rule of celibacy which was binding on both. The Buddha knew what a great force the sex instinct is with life of both man as well as woman. To use the Buddha's own words it is this instinct which drives a man in woman's bondage and a woman in man's bondage. This force, if given an opportunity to have its full force, the rule of celibacy could not last for a minute. To save the rule of celibacy he had to organise two separate *Sanghas.*

To take up the second issue : was any decision possible other than the one the Buddha took ? The women who joined his faith were raw women. They had to be instructed in His Doctorine and they had to be trained in His rules of Discipline. Who could undertake this task ? To whom else could He have entrusted this work ? To none except the male *Bhikkhus* of his Order. For they were already instructed in His Doctrine and trained in His Discipline. And this is what He did. Now what was the relationship that was forged between the *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis* by entrusting the work of instruction of the latter to the former ? This is a necessary question to raise. Without it the explanation of the insubordination of the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* to the *Bhikkhu Sangha* does not become quite clear. The obvious answer to this question is that by entrusting the work of training the *Bhikkhunis* to the *Bhikkhus,* their relationship became one of teacher and pupil. Now does not the relationship of teacher and pupil involve some authority for teacher over the pupil and some submission or subordination on the part of the pupil to the teacher ? What more did the Buddha do ?

In this connection it is useful to compare the relationship between monasteries and nunneries in the Christian Church. Are not the nunneries subordinate to the monasteries ? Of course they are[1]. Can anybody therefore say that Christianity treats women as inferior to men ? Why then should a different interpretation be put upon the arrangement made by the Buddha for regulating the relations between the *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis?*

So far as the *Sutta Pitaka* is concerned there is absolutely no ground for the charge that the Buddha had a prejudice against women and was for ever exhorting men to beware of them.

[1] : See Article "Nuns" in the Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. XI. P. 164.

II

Let us pass from particular instances to the general attitude of the Buddha towards women in general. Did the Buddha hold women in low esteem ? I am sure that whoever reads references to women by the Buddha which occur in the sacred literature of the Buddhists will be convinced that far from doing anything which would have the effect of degrading the woman, the Buddha all along tried to ennoble woman and to elevate her. Let me give a few illustrations in support of this view.

The birth of a daughter has been from ancient past regarded as a calamity by the people of India generally. Did the Buddha share this sentiment ? His attitude towards this question was quite the contrary to the traditional view as is illustrated by this advice to King Prasenajit. Once King Prasenajit was visiting the Buddha at Sravasti in Jeta's garden. A messenger from the Royal Palace came and informed him that his wife Queen Mallika had given birth to a daughter. On hearing this news the King went off his colour and looked sad and dejected. The Buddha noticed this change on his face and asked him for the cause of it. On being informed of it the Buddha said,[1] "Why be sorry? A woman child, O Lord of men, may prove even a better offspring than a male. For she may grow up wise and virtuous... The boy that she may bear may do great deeds and rule great realms..."

In answer to a question as to why some families rise and others decay, the Buddha is reported to have told the *Bhikkhus* that[2] —

> "Whatsoever families, monks, having attained greatness of possessions fail to last long, because they seek not for what is lost, they repair not the decayed, they eat and drink to excess, they put in authority a woman or a man that is immoral. Whatsoever families.. fail to last long all of them do so because of these four reasons or one or other of them.
>
> "Whatsoever families, monks, do last long, all of them do so because they seek for what is lost, repair the decayed, eat and drink in moderation, and put in authority a virtuous woman or

[1] : Samyutta Nikaya : Vol. I, P. 110.

[2] : Anguttara Nikaya : Vol. II, Pp. 254-255.

man. Whatsoever families... do last long, all of them do so because of these four reasons or one or other of them."

In describing to the *Bhikkhus* what happens when a Monarch "who rolls the wheel, *i.e.,* who is destined to be a *Chakravarti* (world monarch) appears in the world, the Buddha is reported to have told the monks that[1]—

> "Whenever such a monarch appears there is the appearance of the seven treasures: the treasure of the Wheel, the Elephant, the Horse, the Jewel, the Woman, the House-father, and the treasure of the Heir Apparent."

On another occasion the Buddha, speaking of the value of a woman to the world, said,[2]

> "Woman is the commodity Supreme because (as the commentator adds) she is of indispensable utility, or because through her *Bodhisattvas* and world rulers take birth."

How can a person in whose view the birth of a daughter was not an occasion for sorrow and might well be an occasion of joy, who held the view that those families are saved from a downfall which place a woman in authority over their affairs, who had no hesitation in describing woman as one of the seven Treasures and a thing of supreme value, be described as a hater or despiser of woman ? These statements are typical of the general sentiments entertained by the Buddha towards womankind. Can anybody say that they are calculated to bring the woman into ridicule and contempt ?

III

Those who see a social wrong in the Buddha placing the *Bhikklumis* under the authority of the *Bhikkhus* do not realize what a revolutionary act it was on the part of the Buddha to have allowed women to take *Sannyas* or *Parivraja* (Monkhood). Under the Brahamanic theory women had already been denied the right to acquire knowledge. When the question of *Sannyas*

[1] : Anguttara Nikaya : Vol. V. P. 83.

[2] : Samyutta Nikaya : Vol. I. P. 62.

came they did to the Indian woman another wrong. As a matter of history *Sannyas* was not an ideal of the Brahmins who worshipped the Vedas and who, for a long time, refused to recognise the *Upanishadas* as sacred literature. *Sannyas* was the ideal of the *Upanishadas* and the end of *Sannyasa* was to realize the *Upanishadic* doctrine that the *Atman* is *Brahma*. The Brahmins were dead opposed to the life of *Sannyas*. Ultimately they yielded but subject to certain conditions. One of the conditions was that women (and *Shudras)* were not to be eligible for *Sannyas*.

It is important to understand the reason why the Brahmins debarred woman from taking *Sannyas* because it helps to understand the attitude of the Brahmins towards woman which was in sharp contrast with that of the Buddha. The reason is stated by Manu. It reads as follows : —

> IX. 18. Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their *Sanskars* (rites) are performed without *Veda Mantras*. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the *Vedas*. The uttering of the *Veda Mantras* is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the *Veda Mantras* they are as untruth is.

Although Manu was later than the Buddha, he has enunciated the old view propounded in the older *Dhanna Sutras*. This view of the women was both an insult and an injury to the women of India. It was an injury because without any justification she was denied the right to acquire knowlege which is the birthright of every human being. It was an insult because after denying her opportunity to acquire knowldege she was declared to be as unclean as untruth for want of knowledge and therefore not to be allowed to take *Sannyas* which was regarded as a path to reach *Brahma*. Not only was she denied the right to realize her spiritual potentiality she was declared to be barren of any spiritual potentiality by the Brahmins.

This is a cruel deal with women. It has no parallel. As Prof. Max Muller[1] has said, "However far the human may be from the Divine, nothing on the earth is nearer to God than man, nothing on earth more Godlike than man". If this is true of man why is this not true of woman ? The Brahmins had no answer.

[1] : Hibbert lectures on Religion, Page 379.

By admitting women to the life of *Parivrajika,* the Buddha, by one stroke, removed both these wrongs. He gave them the right to knowledge and the right to realize their spiritual potentialities alongwith man. It was both a revolution and liberation of women in India. To quote the words of Prof. Max Muller : —

"The history of India teaches us that the galling fetters of the old Brahmanic law were broken at last, for there can be little doubt that we have to recognise in Buddhism an assertion of the rights of individual liberty, and more particularly, of the right of rising above the trammels of society, of going, as it were into the forest, and of living a life of perfect spiritual freedom, whenever a desire for such freedom arose."

This freedom which the Buddha gave to the women of India is a fact of far greater importance and out-weighs whatever stigma which is said to be involved in the subordination of the *Bhikkhunis* to the *Bhikkhu Sangha.* This was not an empty freedom. It was freedom which they keenly enjoyed and sang about "O free indeed! O gloriously free am I....." sang Mutta[1] - a *Bhikkuni,* who was a Brahmin girl. Mettika, another *Bikkhuni,* also a Brahmin girl, sang -".... so sit I here upon a rock. And over my spirit sweeps the breath of liberty[2]."

As Mrs. Rhys Davids Says-[3]

"To gain his freedom mobility ..... they, like their later Christian sisters, had laid down all social position, all domestic success, they had lost their world. But in exchange they had won the status of an individual in place of being adjuncts, however much admired, fostered, and sheltered they might, as such, have been. 'With shaven head, wrapt in their robe'-a dress indistinguishable, it would seem, from the swathing toga and swathed undergarments of the male religieuxs - the Sister was free to come and go, to dive alone into the depths of the wood, or climb aloft."

[1]: Psalms of Sisters No. XI.

[2]: *ibid No.* XXIV.

[3]: Preface to Therigatha.

In allowing women to become *Bhikkhunis* the Buddha not only opened for them the way to liberty, he also allowed them to acquire dignity, independent of sex. To her freedom she could, in the words of Mrs. Rhys Davids :

"Wed the other austere joy of being recognized, at least by her brother *Arahants,* 'as a rational being, without reference to sex. As such she breathed the spiritual atmosphere, she shared the intellectual communion of that religious aristocracy called in the *Pitakas, Ariyas,* with whom she claimed that power of seeing all things as they really are' which the Buddhist called being awake.

'How should the woman's nature hinder Us-us Ariyas says Soma, a Bhikkhuni[1] :

"What can that signify to one in whom

Insight doth truly comprehend the Norm ?

To one for whom the question doth arise :

Am I a woman in such matters, or

Am I a man ? or what not am I, then ?

To such an one is Mara fit to talk !"

This is not all. The Buddha in allowing women to become *Bhikkhunis* he opened them the way to equality with man. As observed by Mrs. Rhys Davids[2] "It is true that the *Bhikkunis* were technically appointed juniors in perpetuity to the *Bhikkhus.* It is equally clear that, by intellectual and more eminence, a *Theri* might claim equality with the highest of the fraternity. In the Psalms an instance occurs, in xxx, vii, where Bhadda associates herself in spiritual attainment with the great Kassapa, successor, as head of the Order, to the Founder himself. In this connection it should be noted that the Buddha did not place any premium on virginity as such. He kept his way open to all classes of women— married, unmarried, widows and even to prostitutes. All could acquire merit, freedom, dignity, an equality along with man."

[1] Psalms No. XVI.

[2] Preface to Therigatha P. P. XVI-XXVII.

IV

There can be no doubt that there has been an utter downfall in position of women in India from what it once was. One cannot say much about the part they played in ancient time in state-craft. But there is no doubt that they did occupy a very high position in the intellectual and social life of the country.

That at one time a woman was entitled to *upanayan* is clear from the *Atharva Veda* where a girl is spoken of as being eligible for marriage having finished her *Brahmacharya.* From the *Shrauta Sutras* it is clear that women could repeat the *Mantras* of the *Vedas* and the women were taught to read the *Vedas.* Panini's *Ashtadhyay* bears testimony to the fact that women attended *Gurukul* (College) and studied the various *Shakhas* (Sections) of the *Veda* and became expert in *Mimansa.* Patanjali's Maha Bhashya shows that women were teachers and taught Vedas to girl students. The stories of women entering into public discussions with men on most abstruse subjects of religion, philosophy and metaphysics are by no means few. The story of public disputation between Janaka and Sulabha, between Yajnavalkya and Gargi, between Yajnavalkya and Maitrei and between Sankaracharya and Vidyadhari shows that Indian women in pre-Manu's time could rise to the highest pinnacle of learning and education.

That at one time women were highly respected cannot be disputed. Among the Ratnis who played so prominent a part in the coronation of the King in Ancient India was queen and the King made her an offering' as he did to the others. Not only the King elect did homage to the Queen he worshipped his other wives of lower castes[2]. In the same way the King offers salutation after the coronation ceremony to the ladies of the chiefs of the *Srenies* (guilds)[3].

This is a very high position for women in any part of the World. Who was responsible for their fall ? It was Manu, the Law Giver of the Hindus. There can be no other answer. To leave no room for doubt, let me quote some of the laws made by Manu regarding women and are to be found in the *Manu-Smriti.*

[1] Jaiswal—Indian Polity, Part ii P. 16.

[2] *ibid* P. 17.

[3] *ibid* P. 82.

II. 213. It is the nature of women to seduce man in this (world). For that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.

II. 214. For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger.

II. 215. One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister or daughter; for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man.

IX. 14. Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; (thinking), '(It is enough that) he is a man', they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.

IX. 15. Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however, carefully they may be guarded in this (world).

IX. 16. Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid in them at the creation to be such, (every) man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

IX. 17. (When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct.

This shows how low was woman in the opinion of Manu. The laws of Manu against women are of a piece with this view.

Women are not to be free under any circumstances. In the opinion of Manu :—

IX. 2. Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control.

IX. 3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never for independence.

IX. 5. Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families.

IX. 6. Considering the higher duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives.

V. 147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

V. 148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

V. 149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible.

Woman is not to have a right to divorce.

IX. 45. The husband is declared to be one with wife, which means that there could be no seperation once a woman is married.

Many Hindus stop here as though this is the whole story regarding Manu's law of divorce and keep on idolizing it by comforting their conscience with the thought that Manu regarded marriage as sacrament and therefore did not allow divorce. This of course is far from the truth. His law against divorce had a very different motive. It was not to tie up a man to a woman but it was to tie up the woman to a man and to leave the man free.

For Manu does not prevent a man from giving up his wife. Indeed he not only allows him to abandon his wife but he also permits him to sell her. But what he does is to prevent the wife from becoming free. See what Manu says :—

IX. 46. Neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband.

The meaning is that a wife, sold or repudiated by her husband, can never become the legitimate wife of another who may have bought or received her after she was repudiated. If this is not monstrous, nothing can be. But Manu was not worried by considerations of justice or injustice in framing his law. He wanted to deprive women of the freedom they had under the Buddhistic regime. Manu was outraged by licence and in putting a stop to it he deprived her of her liberty.

A wife was reduced by Manu to a level of a slave in the matter of property.

IX. 416. A wife, a son and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong.

When she becomes a widow Manu allows her maintenance, if her husband was joint, and a widow's estate in the property of her husband, if she was separate from his family. But Manu never allows her to have any domination over property.

A woman under the laws of Manu is subject to corporal punishment and Manu allows the husband the right to beat his wife.

VIII. 299. A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil, and a younger brother of the full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo.

Under Manu a woman had no right to knowledge. The study of the Veda was forbidden to her by Manu.

II. 66. Even for a woman the performance of the *Sanskaras* are necessary and they should be performed without uttering the *Veda Mantras.*

Offering sacrifices according to Brahmanism formed the very soul of religion. Manu forbids women from performing sacrifices. Manu ordains that :

XI 36-37. A woman shall not perform the daily sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas. If she does it, she will go to hell.

To disable her from performing such sacrifices Manu prevents her from getting the aid and services of a Brahmin priest.

IV. 205-206. A Brahmin must never eat food given at a sacrifice performed by women. Sacrifices performed by women are inauspicious and not acceptable to God. They should, therefore, be avoided.

Finally, a word regarding the ideal of life, Manu has sought to place before a woman. It had better be stated in his own words :-

V. 151. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives and when he is dead, she must not insult his memory.

V. 154. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife.

V. 155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women, apart from their husbands; if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.

Then comes the choicest texts which form the pith and the marrow of this ideal which Manu prescribes for women : -

V. 153. The husband who wedded her with sacred *Mantras,* is always a source of happiness to

his wife, both in season and out of season, in this world and in the next.

V. 150. She must always be cheerful, clever in the management of her household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure.

This the Hindus regard as a very lofty ideal for a woman !!!

As though to put a coping stone on his edifice of disabilities of women Manu declared a new rule that killing a woman was only an *Upapataka* i.e. it was a minor offence.

XI. 67. Liquor, slaying women, *Sudras, Vaishyas,* or *Kshatriyas,* and a theists (are all) minor offences.

One can quite understand why Manu should have said that the killing of a *Sudras, Vaishya or a Kshatriya* was only an *Upapataka.* He was trying to establish that the Brahmin was superior to all these and only the killing of a Brahmin was *Mahapataka.* But why did he not apply the same rule to women ? Only because a woman, in the eyes of Manu, was a thing of no value.

In the face of these quotations can anybody doubt that it was Manu who was responsible for the degradation of women in India ? Most people are perhaps aware of this. But they do not seem to know two things. They do not know what is peculiar in Manu. There is nothing new or startling in the Laws of Manu about woman. They are the views of the Brahmins ever since Brahmanism was born in India. Before Manu they existed only as a matter of social theory. What Manu did was to convert what was a social theory into the law of the State. The second thing they do not know is the reason which led Manu to impose these disabilities upon women, *Sudras* and women were the two chief sections of the Aryan Society which were flocking to join the religion of the Buddha and thereby undermining the foundation of Brahmanic Religion. Manu wanted to stem the tide of women flowing in direction of Buddhism.

It is for this that Manu imposed these disabilities upon women and crippled them permanently. Those who doubt this might well consider the following injunctions contained in Manu Smriti —

V. 88. Funeral rites and obsequies which are performed on the death of a person shall be withdrawn (i.e, shall not be performed) from those who are born out of intermixture, from those who are addicted to asceticism and from those who have ended their lives by committing suicide.

V. 89. They shall also be withdrawn from women who have joined a heretic sect, who have too freely. who have injured a child in their womb or their husband and those who drink wine.

This injunction is among others aimed at (1) those who are addicted to asceticism and (2) women who have joined a heretic sect. In this injuction asceticism refers to *Parivrajakas* i.e. those who have abandoned their homes and taken to *Sannyas* and, in referring to a heretic sect, there is no doubt that Manu has in mind the Buddhist religion. It is therefore clear that when Manu declares that no funeral rites and obsequies shall be performed, for an ascetic or a woman who has joined a heretic sect, what Manu does is to prohibit performance of funeral rites and obsequies of a member of a family-whether male or female-who has joined the Buddha's religion. In other words he wants them to be treated as though they were disaffiliated and ho longer belonged to the family. Manu was the greatest opponent of the Buddhist religion. This is the secret of the many inequities which he heaped upon women. For he knew that if the home is to be protected against the invasion of Buddhism it is the woman who must be put under restraint. And he did it. All responsibility for the decline and fall of woman in India must be fastened upon Manu and not upon the Buddha.

In the compass of a few pages I have endeavoured to present the story of the Rise and fall of the Hindu woman. I have also endeavoured to offer an explanation as to who was the author of their fall and why he brought it about. I hope that the

unprejudiced and the impartial will realize that it was not the Buddha who can be held responsible for the tragedy. If anything the Buddha endeavoured to ennoble the woman it was to raise her to the level of man.[1]

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[1]: Magazine— 'Maha Bodhi' May-June 1951, Vol. 59, Pp. 137-151.

APPENDIX—II

"THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

(*A Rejoinder to an Article Published in "Eve's Weekly" on January 21, 1950, under the title "Our New Republic*")

Lama Govinda

"*In India, women were used to statecraft long before they ever did in Europe. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are full of instances of such women.*" These lines were prominently displayed in an article, published in Eve's Weekly on January 21,1950, under the title "Our New Republic.

Does the learned author of the article hint at the fact that Draupadi, the chief female character of the Mahabharata was gambled away by her husband, or rather husbands (because she had five) or that Sita, who had heroically rejected all advances of her captor Ravana, was rewarded with distrust and doubts in her purity, put to the fire-ordeal and banished in to the jungle ?

If the position of women in those days had been what the writer of the above-mentioned article would have us believe, then we wonder why Draupadi had never been given a chance to gamble away her five husbands, or Sita an opportunity to send her calumniators and doubters on the pyre or into the woods ?

It certainly would have been more correct in this connection to say that the Women of India in those times were used by statecraft.

As to the women of Europe, I cannot say whether they were lagging behind their sisters in India in this respect, but I am quite sure that when some of them got an opportunity to meddle with statecraft they were quick to make use of it.

If Queen Elizabeth had been in the place of Draupadi she would probably have executed her five husbands as she executed her unfortunate lover Lord Essex. But in my opinion Draupadi without statecraft was more lovable woman than Queen Bessie with all her political power and cunning.

Another figure in European history who might have been mentioned with advantage, is Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, who was both a loving mother of many children and an able ruler. And if we want to go into the earlier history of Europe, the Empress Theodora of Byzantium is perhaps the most striking example of a woman, who rose from the lowest position to that of supreme power. She started as a prostitute and ended as an Empress.

I do not think that this would be the ideal of Indian womanhood, just as I do not think that statecraft adds one inch to the dignity of a woman.

Even if it were true that in Indian women were used to statecraft, *long before* they ever did in Europe out author apparently was not able to find any historically varified instances of an earlier period then the Rani of Jhansi and Chandbibi, who both belong to the most recent epochs of India's history.

But the most astonishing statement of the article under review is that "*it was, alas, the Buddhist theory that seems to have first thrust women into the background.*"

What this "theory" is, has unfortunately not been revealed by the learned author, and though I have scrutinized the Budhist Sacred Texts and their teachings, I have found no special theory about women, but only about the human species in general. The Four Noble Truths, the Formula of Dependent Origination, and the Eightfold Path of Liberation make no distinction between man and woman.

All through Buddhist history it was a special feature of Buddhist Society that woman had a far more favourable position than in most Non-Buddhist countries. The fundamental equality of man and woman has been the lodestar of Buddhist Society from its earliest beginnings.

Anybody who has lived in Buddhist countries, be it Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Indo-China, Tibet, knows that the status of women is astonishingly high. Because the Buddhist wife does not look up to her husband as to a god, she is not expected to eat after her husband has finished his meal, or to immolate herself after her husband's death as an alternative to a life of utter dejection and privation. On the contrary, she is free to leave her husband if she

feels that she cannot live with him, and she does not become a social outcaste after her husband's death, but can re-marry if she desires so. Women may have their own affairs, in fact in Burma as well as in Tibet (of which countries I can speak of my own experience) women are perfect equals of men, socially as well as in respect of business affairs, and they often show more enterprise and ability than men, who gladly leave these things to their womenfolk.

Such a position of women in Buddhist society would hardly have been possible if, as the author of the article under review assert, "*the Buddha has a prejudice against women and was forever exhorting men to beware of them*."

To accuse the Buddha, who certainly was the most broadminded, most liberal and tolerant of all the great teachers of the past, and who due to this was and still is revered far beyond the confines of India as no other of her sons,—to accuse such a Teacher of prejudice is certainly an extraordinary feat of misjudgment. If of all the great sages of India was only the Buddha who had a world wide appeal, it was His complete lack of any prejudice (how otherwise, could He be acclaimed and recognized as the Enlightened One ?) the universality of His outlook and His deep understanding of human nature, irrespective of caste, colour, or sex.

It was He, in fact who laid the foundations for the emancipation of women (who under the laws of Manu were in a very unfavourable position) as our learned author admits, thus contradicting his own previous statement that the Buddhists were the first to thrust women into the background. It was the Buddha who declared in unmistakable words that a woman has as great a chance to attain sainthood as a man.

This attitude of early Buddhism is confirmed by the fact that the Buddha on one occasion refused an invitation from princes, because He had already accepted that of a courtesan. The princes were shocked that a " frivolous woman like Amrapali should be thus honoured by the Buddha and tried to dissuade Him. But the Buddha stuck to his word, and Amrapali become one of His most praised woman, disciples. If he had harboured any prejudice against, women here would have been the opportunity to show it.

"*That the Buddha was forever exhorting meant to beware of women*", is one of those half-truths, which misled those who have not taken the trouble to read the Buddha's words in their context.

The Buddha did not exhort "men" in this case, but monks who had taken the vow of chastity in conformance with the ancient Indian *sanyasi* rule, accepted by Buddhist and Hindus alike. Nuns were equally exhorted to beware of men. The exhortation of the Buddha was therefore not due to a prejudice against women, but due to the knowledge of human weakness—in men and women alike.

Buddhist women were the first in India who made a substantial and independent contribution to the religious literature and who were recognized as equals to the best authors of their time. This is shown by the fact that the songs of the Buddhist Sisters (under the title "Therigatha") were given the honoured position of Canonical Scriptures and thus placed beside the words of the Buddha and His most prominent disciples.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism have produced great women, and instead of trying to find fault with the customs and teachings of the past and the sages, who proclaimed them in accordance with the needs of their time and the capacity of understanding of their hearers, we should strive to emulate those great souls among Indian women whose names have survived many a mighty empire, whose thoughts were higher than statecraft and whose hearts greater than the power of monarchs. The figure of Savitri, whose profound love and wisdom vanquished even the King of Death, will ever stand out as a symbol of the noblest qualities of womanhood. The voice of Maitreyi and Gargi are forever heard in the immortal dialogues of the Upanishads, and the songs of the saintly Buddhist Sisters will live in the hearts of Indian women like the devotional songs of Mirabai and the heroism of Padmini." [1]

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[1] : Appendix to the booklet published under title 'The Rise and Fall of the Hindu woman ; who was Responsible for it' ?

That, without penal sanction the ideal of Chaturvarnya cannot be realized, is proved by the story in the Ramayana of Rama killing Shambuka. Some people seem to blame Rama because he want only and without reason killed Shambuka. But to blame Rama for killing Shambuka is to misunderstand the whole situation. Ram Raj was a Raj based on Chaturvarnya. As a king, Rama was bound to maintain Chaturvarnya. It was his duty therefore to kill Shambuka, the Shudra, who had transgressed his class and wanted to be a Brahmin. This is the reason why Rama killed Shambuka. But this also shows that penal sanction is necessary for the maintenance of Chaturvarnya. Not only penal sanction is necessary, but penalty of death is necessary. That is why Rama did not inflict on Shambuka a lesser punishment. That is why Manu-Smriti prescribes such heavy sentences as cutting off the tongue or pouring of molten lead in the ears of the Shudra, who recites or hears the *Veda*. The supporters of Chaturvarnya must give an assurance that they could successfully classify men and they could induce modern society in the twentieth century to reforge the penal sanctions of Manu-Smriti.

The protagonists of Chaturvarnya do not seem to have considered what is to happen to women in their system. Are they also to be divided into four classes, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra? Or are they to be allowed to take the status of their husbands. If the status of the woman is to be the consequence of marriage what becomes of the underlying principle of Chaturvarnya, namely, that the status of a person should be based upon the worth of that person ? If they are to be classified according to their worth is their classification to be nominal or real ? If it is to be nominal then it is useless and then the protagonists of Chaturvarnya must admit that their system does not apply to women. If it is real, are the protagonists of Chaturvarnya prepared to follow the logical consequences of applying it to women ? They must be prepared to have women priests and women soldiers. Hindu society has grown accustomed to women teachers and women barristers. It may grow accustomed to women brewers and women butchers. But he would be a bold person, who would say that it will allow women priests and women soldiers. But that will be the logical outcome of applying Chaturvarnya to women. Given these difficulties, I think no one except a congenital idiot could hope and believe in a successful regeneration of the Chaturvarnya.

XVII

Assuming that Chaturvarnya is practicable, I contend that it is the most vicious system. That the Brahmins should cultivate knowledge, that the Kshatriya should bear arms, that the Vaishya should trade and that the Shudra should serve sounds as though it was a system of division of labour. Whether the theory was intended to state that the Shudra *need not* or that whether it was intended to lay down that he *must not,* is an interesting question. The defenders of Chaturvarnya give it the first meaning. They say,

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*ON MATERNITY BENEFIT BILL

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Sir, I rise to support the first reading of this bill. And in doing so I just wish to reply to a few points that have been raised in the course of this debate against this bill. The Honourable the General Member, in speaking against the bill, first of all, pointed out that this is not an accident—accident as we understand it under the Workmen's Compensation Act, and, therefore, the principle of the Workmen's Compensation Act cannot be extended to the women who would be entitled to get the benefit under this particular bill. I admit, Sir, that this is not an accident. But it does not follow from that, that women are not entitled to get the benefit which the proposed bill desire to confer upon them. The principle on which this bill is based is altogether biased. There is absolutely, I believe, unanimity on this proposition that the pre-natal conditions which affect the mother are an important factor in the bill and the subsequent bringing up of the child. I do not think anybody will controvert that proposition. And I believe, therefore, Sir, that it is in the interests of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the pre-natal period and also subsequently, and the principle of the bill is based entirely on that principle. That being so, Sir, I am bound to admit that the burden of this ought to be largely borne by the Government. I am prepared to admit this fact because the conservation of the people's welfare is primarily the concern of the Government. And in every country, therefore, where the maternity benefit has been introduced, you will find that the Government has been subjected to a certain amount of charge with regard to maternity benefit. But that being so, Sir, I am not prepared to admit that the employer who employs a woman, under such circumstances, is altogether free from the liability of such benefit in the interests of the woman and the reason for this is this. There is no doubt that an employer employs women in certain industries because he finds that there is a greater profit to be gained by him by the employment of women than he would gain by the employment of men. He is able to get *pro rata* larger benefits out of women than he would get by employing men. That being so, it is absolutely reasonable to say that to a certain extent at least the employer will be liable for this kind of

*B.L.C. Debates, Vol. XXIII, pp. 381-82, dated 28th July 1928.

benefit when he gets a special benefit by employing women instead of men. I, therefore, say that although there ought to have been some liability imposed on the Government in the matter of maternity benefit, I think the bill is not altogether wrong if it seeks to impose the liability under the present circumstances on the employer. I, therefore, support the bill on that account

It is stated that this bill is applied only to factories and not to other industries or to the agricultural occupation. The reply to that is very simple. It is to those industries where the conditions are such that they particularly affect the health of a woman that this principle is extended. In agriculture and other occupations the women are not exposed to those dangers or to those factors which obtain in factories and which affect the health of the women working in those factories. That is the reason why, for instance, such legislation is usually confined only to factories. The same may be said, for instance, with regard to the Workmen's Compensation Act. That Act applies to accident which may arise in factories in the course of the employment of labour for this very reason, and you will find that legislation is confined only to factories and not to other occupations.

Now, in respect of the burden on industries, the Honourable the General Member said that it will result in the reduction of wages. I am not certain whether it will result in a reduction of wages. Even if it does, it will mean that the burden on the industries will to a certain extent be shifted elsewhere and the Honourable the General Member ought therefore to have no objection on that ground. If this bill is passed, my submission is that the burden will probably be shifted on to the consumer and if it is shifted on to the consumer, the society as such ought not to object to pay the larger price for the produce in order that the producers who produce it may be benefitted.

Then, it is said that it is unjust to confine this bill to the Bombay Presidency only and that it ought to be extended to the whole of India, and that other Presidencies and provinces in India ought to be put on a par with the Bombay Presidency. My submission to you, Sir, is this. Suppose that this bill is applied to the whole of British India, what is there to prevent somebody rising up and saying, "Why should this bill be confined to India only and not to other countries ? India will be put at a disadvantage with respect to the other countries of the world and therefore let us wait till the whole world adopts the principle of this bill and then we may all be on a par with each other". I submit that there is no substance in this argument and I think, therefore, the benefits contemplated by this bill ought to be given by this Legislature to the poor women who toil in our factories in this Presidency.

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APPENDIX I

*ON MEASURES FOR BIRTH-CONTROL

Mr. P. J. Roham (Ahmednagar South): Sir, I beg to move—

> "This Assembly recommends to Government that in view of the urgent need of limiting the family units, Government should carry on an intensive propaganda in favour of birth-control among the masses of this Province and should provide adequate facilities for the practice of bith-control."

Question proposed.

Mr. P. J. Roham (Addressed the House in Marathi): The educated class has, by this time, fully realized the necessity of birth-control and fortunately the leaders in our country also are unanimous on this point. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sir Ravindranath Tagore and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, know very well the importance and the urgency of the movement for birth-control and are in favour of contraceptives. Babu Subhash Chandra Bose, the President of the Indian National Congress, said in his presidential speech :

> "If the population goes up by leaps and bounds, as it has done in the recent past, our plans are likely to fall through."

Even Mahatma Gandhi has written long ago as follows :

> "I must not conceal from the reader the sorrow I feel when I hear of births in this land."

Very few have an adequate idea of the immense loss sustained by children born of persons who are handicapped either physically, mentally or financially. The parents as well as the society also suffer very much. The prevention of the births of such children would considerably reduce the death-rate among mothers who succumb to child-birth and its concomitant diseases, lower infantile mortality, improve public health by removing the many diseases due to want of even the prime necessaries of life felt by many persons, check the offences perpetrated by persons suffering from intense poverty and would bring about an all-round uplift of society by affording full scope to its spiritual advancement.

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*Speech delivered by Shri P. J. Roham. He has expressly stated that the speech was based in all respects on the points drawn by Dr. Ambedkar for his own speech and that Dr. Ambedkar is the father of this speech. Shri Roham further states that he was complimented by Dr. Ambedkar for almost reproducing the speech which, he had contemplated to deliver in the Assembly, but he could not do so owing to his inability to attend the Assembly on that day, i.e. on 10th November 1938.

B.L.A. Debates, Vol. 4 (Part 3), November 1938. pp. 4024-38.

The present keen struggle of life renders timely marriage impossible for many and thus exposes them to various diseases and habits. Many women become invalid for life and some even lose their lives by the birth of children in their diseased condition or in too great numbers or in too rapid succession. Attempts at abortion, resorted to for the prevention of unwanted progeny, exact a heavy toll of female lives. Unwanted children are often neglected by their mothers and hence they become nothing but a burden to society which is further deteriorated by the addition of defective progeny from diseased persons. Birth-control is the only sovereign specific that can do away with all these calamities. Whenever a woman is disinclined to bear a child for any reason whatsoever, she must be in a position to prevent conception and bringing forth progeny which should be entirely dependent on the choice of women. Society would in no way profit by the addition of unwanted progeny. Only those children who are welcomed by their parents, can be of social benefit and hence every woman must be enabled to resort to prevention of conception quite easily.

Poverty is the root-cause of immorality. The following passage from the essay read by Prof. Dr. Tondler before the Congress at Vienna in 1933 would show the evil consequences of insufficiency of living accommodation. The professor said, "On the average every family gets one room in Germany, two and a half rooms in France and three rooms in England. Seventy-five thousand families had no tenements of their own in Berlin in 1925. The result is that children sleep with the adults not only in the same room but also in the same bed. Many children lose their lives by the overcrowding in insanitary dwellings. Whole families are stricken with veneral diseases. Girls have to succumb to sexual intercourse even before they are mature. Sexual connections often take place between parents and their children and brothers and sisters. The boys learn to commit thefts and the girls become prostitutes. The same condition prevails at Vienna. In 1919, out of the tenements let out, 10 per cent. had only one small room ; 37 per cent. had one big room and 23 per cent. had one small room and one big room. Out of the children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who maintained themselves, twenty per cent. had no separate beds of their own. Towns and villages fare even worse."

In our country, the same condition prevails in cities like Bombay. A few exceptions apart, it is observed that virtue is palsied where poverty prevails. Further on it will be shown how it is well-nigh impossible to uproot poverty without the aid of birth-control. The aphorism, बुभुक्षित : किम् न करोती पापम् ,is well known.

When we have thus realised that birth-control is the *sine qua-non* for every progress, we must consider the means to attain that end. To be satisfied with only that much of sexual enjoyment that is necessary for getting the desired number of children and to banish sexual thoughts from one's mind when progeny is not required, is one of the ways. The use of modern contraceptives is the other way. As for the first way, it must be

remembered that while continence in the unmarried state may be possible, it is nothing but displaying ignorance about human nature to expect that young and healthy married couples, living together and fond of each other, can observe continence for years together. The cases of strong-willed persons, whose minds are not affected in the presence of objects of enjoyment, apart, there is no doubt that ordinary human beings are bound to fall a prey to the influence of enticements. Is it not strange, therefore, that this fact, which is as clear as daylight, is denied by some.

Self-control has been proved to be absolutely useless for birth-control from the experience of several countries and ages. Even the advocates of continence cannot claim that ordinary persons will be able to eschew sexual intercourse altogether throughout their lives. The laying aside of continence even for a single day every year may lead to an annual conception. Even, if we assume that self-control enables certain persons to bring about birth-control, we cannot draw the conclusion that others will be able to follow them. It is necessary to remember that just as appetite for food differs in the case of different persons, so sexual appetite also varies from person to person.

Strict observance of certain rules laid down in Hindu scriptures necessitates the neglect of the ideal of family-limitation. For instance, verse 8, Chapter 54, of "Vishnu Smriti" enjoins sexual intercourse on certain specified days.

Sir, honourable members have received a pamphlet written by Mrs. Sarojini Mehta, M.A., I am not going to read the whole pamphlet, but will quote only a few passages from it :

> "Whenever the subject of birth-control is broached, the burden of our opponents' song is that continence (Brahmacharya) is the sovereign specific for our country and that it is better to leave Westerners to be blessed by their own artificial remedies. I humbly supplicate these honourable persons to state the grounds upon which they hold this view. It is stated that our people are spiritualistic, while Westerners are materialistic. It has now become well-nigh nauseating to hear this parrot cry repeated. In what way are our people spiritualistic ? Have our people renounced the world and become ascetics ? Can mere repetition of certain catch-phrases like "All this is delusion." "One must abandon attachment to worldly life", turn people into spiritualistic ? Does not every one of our villages possess Shylocks ready to demand their pound of flesh from poor and innocent debtors ? Are there not bankers mean enough to devour the deposits of widows ? Have we not scoundrels who are debased enough to leave stranded helpless widows whom they themselves have misled ? Can we claim that our society is without men who have discarded their chaste and devoted wives and taken to prostitutes ? I am completely at a loss to understand how a society can be called spiritualistic, in which many are ruined by matrimonial transactions that amount to virtual sales of brides and bridegrooms, in which a person refusing to give an absenquial feast to his

caste-people is out-casted, in which men are planning their second marriages while their first wives are burning on funeral pyres, in which even old fogies of sixty years can marry girls of twelve on the strength of monetary bribes and in which the treatment offered to widows is worse than that given even to the beasts. Western materialism cannot be held responsible for the rotten state of our society discribed above. On the contrary it is those who have come into contact with western materialism who are trying their best to remedy these evils, though their efforts are proving nothing but a cry in the wilderness."

Further on, in another paragraph, she says :

"The conduct of Indraraj towards Ahilya, of Parashar Rishi towards Satyawati and of Suryadev towards Kunti would make those perpetrators liable for rigorous imprisonment in this age of Kali but that being considered to be Satya Yug, we not only connive at these delinquencies but raise books containing such descriptions to the status of 'Sacred Books' and insist that they must be prescribed as test-books in the curriculum for children. How many lessons on continence can pupils find in the Mahabharat, the Bhagwat and the Puranas ? How can an age, that never knew what continence was, inspire us to observe that virtue ? How is it possible to consider that age to have observed continence in which there were incidents like the story of King Dushyanta, who first misled an innocent and guileless girl living in the hermitage of a sage and then discarded her when she was pregnant ? When one considers the number of children born to certain persons mentioned in very ancient narratives, a doubt naturally arises in one's mind as to whether the people in those days ever dreamt what continence was. How can one believe that continence was observed in those times when one considers that Sagar begot sixty thousand sons and that there were a hundred Kowrawas, twenty-seven daughters of Daksha Prajapati and several other such instances ? Continence was paid scant respect in bygone days. It can actually be seen that in these days it is kept at a distance everywhere. The birth-rate of our country is not falling lower than that of any 'materialistic' country. Brahmacharya cannot be observed even where the life of a woman, already the mother of many children, is jeopardised by an additional delivery. It is neglected even in the families of paupers, dying of hunger, where the addition of even a single individual to the family would be nothing short of a calamity. Even in these days of unemployment, when it is practically impossible to find outlets for sons, additional children are born even in middle class families every year or year and a half. In castes, in which the usage of dowry prevails, parents express much grief at the birth of a daughter, kill her at the very outset or bring her up most negligently so that she may die a natural death. They, however, never resort to continence to avoid the chances of girls being born. In spite of all these instances we go on proclaiming that continence alone is the ideal for our country ! Of what

earthly use is such conduct ? We have to take into account the state of things actually existing before our eyes. There are no chances of making any improvement in our condition by mere talk of ideals."

Dr. K. B. Antrolikar : Sir, all that may be taken as read, because every member has received it.

Mr. P. J. Roham : Sir, I have made it clear that I am not going to read the whole of it. I request my honourable friend Dr. Antrolikar to have patience.
Mr. P. J. Roham : She continues :

"If, therefore, they have got the country's welfare at heart, they ought to try their level best to popularise continence by founding associations for the purpose of carrying on the work systematically, just as the birth-controllers are doing to popularise contraceptives. If, however, they are either unwilling or unable to do anything in this matter, the hands of the champions of contraception will be strengthened."

As a doctor has wisely remarked, if men had to bear the pangs which women have to undergo during child-birth none of them would ever consent to bear more than a single child in his life.

It is wrong to hold that because the ideal of large families is before society up to this time nobody wishes to limit his family. Human beings, who earnestly desire to be saddled with large families, are rare. Ordinary persons do want to limit their families and do not even flinch to have recourse to diabolical methods such as abortion, infanticide, etc. Such attempts are witnessed everywhere. From an account published by "The People's Tribune" in 1934 it is found that in 1933 over 24,000 dead bodies of little infants were picked up in the street of Shanghai alone and the same state prevails throughout most of China. It is bitter and terrible poverty that makes the parents expose their infants. In the light of such instances, it is futile to hope that ordinary persons will be able to avoid progeny merely through self-control. It is, therefore, established that there is no go without recourse to modern contraceptives. To deny the necessity of those remedies is to show one's preference for abortions, infanticides, etc.

Some people think that they would be losers if the numbers in their particular race, religion, or region are lessened. They are afraid that their adversaries would thereby be enabled to gain ground over them. In the first place, it is necessary to remember in this connection that the rate of increase of a population does not necessarily dwindle down as soon as family limitation is resorted to. That rate is dependent not merely on the birth-rate but chiefly on the survival-rate. The experience of several scientists from different places has proved that the higher the birth-rate, the higher is the death-rate also and no sooner the birth goes down, the death-rate also declines. The result is that not only is the survival-rate not adversely affected but very often it even rises. Dr. Maria Stopes has found from the experience gained in "The Mothers' Clinic" that the

greater the number of conceptions the higher is the rate of maternal and infantile mortality. Similar is the experience of other scientists. Dr. J. M. Munro, M.D., F.R.F.P.S., says in his book "Maternal Mortality and Morbidity" :

> "The strongest argument in favour of limiting the family is that by the fourth birth the mortality-rate very nearly approaches that of the first birth, looked upon generally as the most serious and dangerous. After the fourth birth, the mortality rate steadily and markedly rises with each successive pregnancy and parturition. The same applies to still-births and neo-natal deaths."

Due to excessive child-mortality, the rate of growth of the population of Countries like India is not equal to that of countries like England though the birth-rates in countries of the former type are higher than those in the latter type. The birth-rate of England is nearly half that of India. Yet we find that the population in England increased by nearly 23 per cent. between 1901 and 1931, while the population in India rose by only 17 per cent. in the same period. This will show that even for a rapid growth of numbers, the better way is to adopt the practice of birth-control and thus cut down infantile mortality.

It must also be remembered that for modern wars comparatively few persons are necessary. An army, well-equipped with modern materials for warfare, can route an army much greater in number than itself, if the latter one is not so well-equipped. In the former world war, countries of low birth-rates vanquished those with high birth-rates.

In the world, we can witness many societies that are small in numbers but distinguished in respect of wealth, culture etc. In our country, the Parsee community is an illustration on this point. To hanker after quantity is, therefore, not a very profitable ideal. The aphorism, वरमेको गुणीपुत्रो न च मुर्खशतान्यपि, is well known.

After this, it is worth while keeping in mind that it is principally poverty that is at the root of the animosity between different races, societies and countries. When poverty will be uprooted, the root-cause of much of such hatred will be eradicated and then nobody need be afraid of molestation from others.

The example of Western nations shows us that modern contraception is utilised by persons of all races, religions and strata. For instance, it is found that the notion that the Roman Catholics are against birth-control is unfounded. France is a Roman Catholic country and still it is notorious that the birth-rate in that country is quite low. The following ten countries had the lowest birth-rates in 1932 : —

Sweden	...	...	...	14.5
Germany	...	...	...	15.1
Austria	...	...	...	15.2
England and Wales	...	...	...	15.3

Norway	...	...	...	16.3
Australia	...	...	...	16.4
Switzerland	...	...	...	16.7
New Zealand	...	...	...	17.1
United States	...	...	...	17.3
France	...	...	...	17.3

Among the three lowest countries are Austria, which is entirely Catholic, and Germany, which is one-third Catholic.

The following figures, the birth-rates of important cities, illustrate the very point. They are all for 1927 or 1928 : —

London	...	...	...	16.1
Cologne	...	...	...	16.0
Geneva	...	...	...	14.6
Milan	...	...	...	14.5
Turin	...	...	...	13.2
Prague	...	...	...	12.5
Munich	...	...	...	12.0
Vienna	...	...	...	10.6

With the exception of London, all the above towns are solidly Roman Catholic, yet they all have a lower birth-rate than London. Three of them are in Mussolini's Italy.

It will be thus seen that the fear, that other communities will neglect birth-control and will thus become stronger in numbers, is altogether a baseless one.

Speeches of statesmen, who are responsible for wars, clearly show that economic difficulties, due to pressure of population, are at the root of most of the modern wars, Bernhardt, the Kaiser, Hitler, Mussolini and Gooring have often stressed this point in no ambiguous words. For instance, Adolf Hitler says in his book, Mein Kampf :

> "Through the mad multiplication of the German people before the war, the question of providing the necessary daily bread came in an ever sharper manner into the foreground of all political and economic thought and action."

Further on he says :

> "Only an adequate amount of room upon this earth secures to a nation the freedom of its existence—The National Socialist movement must endeavour to do away with the disproportion between our numbers and our territory ..... Ground and territory must be the object of our foreign politics." (pp. 728-35).

In his recent historic speech, delivered on the 12th of September 1938, Hitler says :

> "They expect Germany, where 140 persons are squeezed into a square kilometre, to keep her Jews, whereas the powers with only a few persons per kilometre do not want them ....."

Similarly Mussolini has said :

"We are hungry for land, because we are prolific and intend to remair so." (From "Foreign Affairs", October 1926).

"Italy demands that her indisputable need of sun and land shall be recognised by all other nations. Should they fail to do so. Italy will be forced to take matters into her own hand." (From "Sunday Times", November 14, 1926).

The Deputy Speaker : The honourable member has exceeded the time-limit.

Mr. B. K. Gaikwad : Sir, may I know what is the time-limit ?

The Deputy Speaker : Half-an-hour.

Mr. B. K. Gaikwad : On a point of information, Sir. The honourable member who moved the last resolution (Mr. Shrikant) spoke, I believe, for more than an hour.

The Deputy Speaker : Extension of the time is within the discretion of the Chair.

Mr. B. K. Gaikwad : Can that indulgence not be given to other resolutions ?

Mr. P. J. Roham : Sir, I do not wish to take much time of the House, but I have still some more points to make and request you to kindly allow me some more minutes.

It is, therefore, obvious that all those who stand for permanent world-brotherhood, must discountenance every attempt at increase of numbers and must try their best to limit populations by means of birth-control.

The fear that birth-control propaganda will fail to filter down to the masses and the result of the movement will thus be dysgenic instead of eugenic, is also groundless. The experience gained in Western countries establishes the fact that the lower classes do take advantage of contraceptives as soon as they are made cognizant of them, the need being greater in their cases. The masses in our country, though illiterate, are intelligent enough to know in what their own interest lies and hence there is no doubt that they will fully utilise this invention also as soon as they are made aware of its existence. Vasectomy would be found to be useful in the case of such persons and hence Government and municipalities must provide facilities in this respect in their hospitals, etc.

The late principal Gole has clearly shown in his book "हिंदु धर्म आणि सुधारणा" that even villagers have many virtues and it is really they that replenish the supply of good citizens.

The opponents of this movement try to show its futility by pointing out the examples of France, Germany and Italy but they forget that we cannot follow these countries unless it is proved that their attempts at the increase of their populations are justified. In the first place, it must be kept in mind that the birth-rates of these nations are much lower than the birth-rate of our country. Our birth-rate is 35 whereas in 1936 the birth-rates of Italy,

France and Germany were 22.2, 15 and 19 respectively. In 1900 the birth-rate in Germany was 35.6 but in 1933 it came down to 14.7. Italy and France also have their birth-rates much reduced since that time. In England the birth-rate was 33.9 in 1851-55 but in 1931 it was lowered to 15.3. Our birth-rate is practically stationary for the last fifty years and hence it would be unwise for us to imitate the efforts of other countries towards raising that rate.

It is quite natural for imperialists to lament the slackening of the rate of increase of the people of their race and it is not surprising that they should raise cries like "Renew or Die". It is, however, strange to see that those cries should make even some educated persons suspicious about the benefits of birth-control. An article, "Renew or Die", by Sir Leo Chiozza Money in "The Nineteenth Century and After" for February 1938 will illustrate the point. This writer has assumed that white leadership is necessary for the good of all humanity and has raised a cry to arrest the decline in the number of the white people. Now, in the first place, many will refuse to admit that white supremacy has benefitted the world and secondly few educated persons will be prepared to go to the length of maintaining that the decline in the number of white people will bring down any calamity upon humanity. Besides this, the postulates of this person are all wrong. He has taken it for granted that the birth-rate in England will gradually become lower and lower and that in the year 2,035 the population of England will be reduced to 4,400,000 (44 lacs). But the facts are that the birth-rate in England is increasing instead of going down. In 1933 it was 14.4 but in July 1938 it becomes 15.3. Similarly whereas the writer has estimated that the population of England and Wales in 1940 would be only 40,700,000, the actual figure for 1937 there was already 41,031,000 and it is increasing at the rate of 190,000 people per year. These facts will show that one must take the precaution of not being misled by such articles.

Emigration is sometimes suggested as a remedy for finding an outlet to over-population but that remedy also is not very promising. Compulsion in emigration, amounting to transportation is out of question. Very few persons have the courage and the inclination necessary for leaving one's own country, endeared to one's heart by reminiscences of childhood and the presence of relatives and friends and made agreeable by a suitable climate and other factors and to repair to a distant land in which there is the danger of the climate being found to be an unsuitable one and in which the inhabitants are different from oneself in language, customs and manners. Generally, people willing to emigrate are those who are fit to be good citizens and who are able and energetic. It is really a loss to the motherland that such people should emigrate. These persons can easily maintain themselves in their own country but ambition impels them to try to better their lot by going to distant lands. Emigration is practically useless in the case of persons who are handicapped either physically or mentally or

financially and it is really these people that stand in need of help. Considered from the point of the necessary capital alone, this remedy cannot afford relief to many persons.

Besides this, it must be kept in mind that sparsely populated countries are unwilling to accommodate others because they require elbow-room for their own increasing progeny. Canada is a colony in the British Empire mainly inhabited by Englishmen but it is notorious that the Canadians refused to allow English labourers, who had gone there for seasonal work, to settle in their land. Wars are occasioned by the attempts of populous countries to force their entrance in sparse regions. An illustration on the point, which is quite recent and near to us, is afforded by Burma. The cause underlying the recent communal riots there was mainly the suspicion in the minds of the Burmans that Indian marred their material progress. Compared to over-populated countries, regions of sparse populations are very few, Japan, Italy, Germany, China, India and many other countries are over-populated. It is not possible to find adequate room for emigrants from all these lands.

One more point in this connection is also worth mentioning. Emigration cannot solve the population problem of a country permanently. Like air, expanding population has a tendency to fill up vacuum immediately, leading to the recurrence of the former condition and hence it is obvious that there is no go without birth-control.

Some think that as soon as child-marriages are given up and late marriages are introduced, the increase in population will be checked. But this belief also is an unfounded one. In the first place, years must elapse before the ages at which girls are married would be sufficiently raised in our country. The years of greatest fertility in the case of girls are those between 18 and 22. In Western countries, women marry after this period. That is, they marry when their time of greatest fertility is over. When we notice the difficulties in the enforcement of the Sarda Act, fixing the minimum age of marriage of a girl at 14, we can easily see that it is almost useless to hope that in the near future women in our country will postpone their marriages up to 22 and population will be checked thereby. Mr. P. K. Wattal has drawn the following conclusions from the fertility-enquiry conducted specially in connection with the 1931 census.

(1) That girls married at ages below twenty give birth to a smaller number of children than girls married at ages above twenty.

(2) That the survival-rate of children born to mothers married at ages below twenty is much less than that of children born to mothers married at ages above twenty.

These conclusions show us that even when late marriages would come into vague generally, there is no chance of population being appreciably checked thereby. More children would live upto mature ages and hence there is a chance of an increase and not a decrease in the rate of growth of our population.

Dr. G. S. Ghurye, Ph.D., University Professor of Sociology, Bombay, says in his article, "Fertility Data of the Indian Census of 1931" in the "Journal of the University of Bombay" (Vol. III, May 1934) : —

> "If the above tentative conclusion about the co-relation between fertility and the age of woman at marriage should prove to be correct, then with the increase in woman's age at marriage which is quite essential, there would be an increase in the fertility or marriage. As it is, I believe our population is very large and Our increase undesirable and to help its increase at a greater rate would be suicidal. With our efforts to raise the women's age at marriage, therefore, there must also be carried on an intensive campaign for control of birth."

It must not, moreover, be forgotten that prostitution is encouraged by people being unable to marry at proper ages and other evil consequences also follow thereby. It is, therefore, necessary to resort to birth-control if marriage at a proper age is aimed at.

The view is held that economic independence of women will lessen the growth of population but it also does not hold water. Economic independence has no power to free a person from the clutches of Eros. Few women can observe perfect continence throughout their lives and hence this remedy would be found to be fruitless. Even now, women of the lower classes are actually helping their families with their own earnings but that fact does not seem to help family-limitation to any extent.

Some persons hold the view that though birth-control may be necessarily on medical and hygenic grounds, still it is not required for solving economic difficulties. They maintain that our country has got much scope for economic and agricultural development and efforts in these directions would raise the standard of life of our people appreciably. On close examination, however, this view also is found to be quite untenable. Want of sufficient capital and rich customers would prevent any material development of our industries. Similarly, insufficiency of fertile lands, rain-fall and manures stand in the way of any substantial increase in our agricultural production. Except in Assam, there is very little fertile land that has not yet been brought under cultivation. In Burma, there is even now sufficient suitable land awaiting cultivation and it was the figure of such land from that province that misled certain people into the belief that India has even yet sufficient fertile virgin land. In our province, 86.4 per cent. of the cultivable land has already been brought under the plough and it is doubtful whether even a fraction of the rest of the land is of any value. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture much of such land is worthless. A great portion of the agricultural land in our country has become barren through incessant cropping and want of sufficient manures.

Through the excessive growth of population, our country suffers from deficiency of forests and pasture-lands. In Canada 34.3 per cent. of cultivable land is reserved for pasturage. This proportion is 21.5 in France,

18.3 in Italy, 14.3 in Germany but in our country it is only 1.6. These figures will show to what strait our cattle is forced. Cast our glance in whatever direction we may come across mere skeletons of cattle. Though our people pride themselves upon their humanitarianism, they have, in their struggle for land, unjustly deprived the dumb creatures of much of their pasturage and brought it under tillage. Our agriculture, therefore, is suffering from insufficiency of useful cattle and organic manures like cow-dung, and hence it is very difficult to effect many appreciable improvements in it. Some persons point out the large produce per acre of rice in Japan and China and hold out the hope that there is scope for materially increasing our produce of that crop. There are grounds, however, to doubt the correctness of the figures of the production of rice in those countries. Count Karlo Sforra, former Minister for Foreign Affairs for Italy, contributed an article styled "The conflict between China and Japan" to a recent number of the "International Conciliation," a monthly published from New York. It is stated therein that from 1900, there is an appreciable decrease in the rice production per acre in Japan. There is considerable evidence to show that figures about agriculture in Japan are not reliable. Besides this, notice also must be taken of the facts that Japan is blessed with plenty of timely and all-the-year round rainfall and abundance of manures due to her extensive forests and also with a climate ideally suited to her rice crops ; combination of advantages rarely witnessed anywhere else. Although it may be admitted that self-rule may effect some betterment of the lot of our masses, no lasting and appreciable improvement in the economic condition of our people can be hoped for unless the growth of our population is deliberately checked. As has been already explained, with every opportunity afforded for its expansion, population begins to grow rapidly and thus nullifies all the advantages secured through great efforts. Hence, experience has made many scientists to hold the view that unless precaution is taken to regulate population growth by means of birth-control along with efforts to improve the economic condition of the people there cannot be any substantial and permanent rise in the standard of life of the masses.

The fact, that mere self-rule is powerless to effect an all-round improvement in the condition of a people, is demonstrated to the hilt by the examples of many independent nations. Although, through various reasons, including a low birth-rate, the economic condition of the inhabitants of countries like England and America is superior to that obtaining in this country—poverty prevents many of our countrymen from obtaining a nourishing food—still it is far from satisfactory. Even there, many find it difficult to maintain a standard of life necessary for perfect health. According to President Roosevelt one-third of the inhabitants of America do not get sufficient nourishing food. One of the reasons for this is that even there birth-control is not practised to the extent to which it is necessary. There is plenty of fertile land per head in countries that are newly settled and hence the

people there get more nourishing food than that obtained by persons in thickly populated nations. Here are the figures of consumption per head per annum in Australia and Italy :

	Australia	*Italy*
Milk and its products (gals.) ...	102	23
Meat (lbs.)	202	35
Fruit (lbs.)	104	40
Sugar (lbs.)	107	18
Wheat (lbs.)	297	351

Every article of food except wheat is consumed in far greater quantities in Australia than in Italy.

Out of the nations of the old world, countries like Holland that have their birth-rates much reduced through birth-control, are much happier than the rest.

In the Bombay Presidency, the amount of milk available per head per day is only one and a quarter "tolas". According to authorities on nutrition, every individual must get on an average at least one pint of milk per day.

The main object of the movement for birth-control is to bring about a state of things wherein every country will have its birth-rate suitably reduced so that it would thus be able to maintain its population decently with the aid of its own produce.

Some are under the impression that modern scientific discoveries have solved the problems of food for mankind and that it is only mal-distribution that is at the root of the present economic difficulties. Fair distribution of property would, in their opinion, bring about plenty everywhere. There is no doubt that in many places injustice prevails in the division of property and every impartial public worker must take all steps to secure justice for wronged persons in this respect. It is, however, necessary to remember that mere equal distribution will never be able to bring about a permanent and material amelioration of the condition of the masses unless growth of population is controlled by means of family-limitation.

Land being the chief source of all wealth, there cannot be plenty for all unless plenty of fertile land falls to the share of each individual. Agricultural experts like Sir Damiel Hall and Prof. East have pointed out that about two and a half acres of cultivable land are needed to support one individual on the western European standard. But in all old countries, people have to. maintain themselves on land much less than this. In India, there is only three quarters of an acre of cultivable land for each individual and, as has been already pointed out, according to the opinion of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, much of the uncultivated land in this country is practically useless.

The view that the advent of chemical fertilisers has solved the problem of manures is also not a sound one. Artificial manures cannot be used at each and every place.

Rao Bahadur D. L. Sahastrabudhe, M.Ag., M.Sc, retired Agricultural

Chemist to the Government of Bombay, wrote in his article in "Sahyadri" for October 1936 as follows : —

> "Experience has shown that artificial manures cannot be utilised everywhere. Organic manures like cow-dung must accompany the use of chemical fertilisers. Otherwise, artificial manures do not prove to be congenial to the crops. Similarly the crop that is to be manured with chemical fertilisers must have plentiful supply of water to prevent an injury to it.
>
> Besides this, it must be noted that the two chief fertilisers are nitrates and phosphates and neither is of much use without the other. The supply of phosphates, however, is very limited. Sir Federick Keeble says :
>
> 'Nearly all the soil of the world are famishing for phosphates. (Fertilisers and Food Production) (1932), p. 221. Professor Armstrong says :
>
> 'The solution of the nitrogen problem by Crookes has brought us nearer to destruction rather than saved us, by hastening the depletion of irreplaceable phosphatic stores.'."

Almost all places are suffering from inadequacy of forests and as a result thereof there is also a shortage of water and manures.

The present Congress Government are trying to uplift the masses of this Bombay Presidency (hear, hear). But all their efforts will go in vain if the population-problem is not tackled by means of birth-control.

The Deputy Speaker : The Honourable Member may now bring his remarks to a close.

Mr. P. J. Roham : Yes, Sir. Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee has in his book. 'Food Planning for 400 Millions", states :

> "Unless some check is placed upon population-growth, any other remedy tends to be only temporary, as in the latter country (China), for population will rapidly rise again to the maximum number of persons the land will support. As population outruns faster the educational facilities that may be provided, while the taxable capacity hardly increases, it is clear that the pressure of population cannot be viewed merely in relation to the food-supply. An expanding population makes readjustments more and more difficult. A rational family planning and education of the masses in birth-control, must be accepted as the most effective means of combating population-increase."

Bombay is the gateway of India and this movement also entered this country through that very gate. It would be in the fitness of things, therefore, that it should also be nurtured in this very province. Few people get an opportunity for doing acts that would immortalize their names. Birth-control movement has afforded such an opportunity to our provincial government and it is hoped that they will not let it slip but will fully utilize it to the benefit of themselves and the people.

●●

land, planters, and such people.

6238. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* But, as I say, in order to effect your purpose, if it were necessary, you say that distinction shall not be based upon caste, creed, race or religion ?

Sir Edward Benthall : Yes ; it is a matter of legal draftsmanship.

(9)

Lady Layton, Mrs. O. Stracey and Sir Philip Hartog, on behallf of the British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise

*C67. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* I would like to ask one question. I do not know whether you agree with me, but I suppose when you press for votes for women, I think you also desire that the franchise should be so devised that the women who will be brought upon the register will be drawn from all strata of Indian society, and not necessarily drawn, either from the upper strata or the middle strata or the lower strata exclusively ; that there ought to be some proportion of the women on the electoral roll to the communities from which they are drawn ?

Lady Layton : As far as is practically possible, certainly.

C68. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* I mean, it is not your case that you want this mathematical ratio of 1 to 4 or 1 to 5, but apart from that ratio, you would also desire that all women from all sections should be on the register ?

Lady Layton : Certainly, as far as possible, we do want to feel that the urban and rural voters and the different sections will be adequately represented.

C69. *Dr B. R. Ambedkar :* You will also agree, I suppose, that if the education qualification or the property qualification were fixed higher, the result of that would be that you would be getting on to the electoral roll women drawn from one section of Indian society alone ?

Lady Layton : That is so. I would supplement that by saying that if it were administratively possible, we should welcome, and we have pressed in our Memorandum, that the wives of the lower property qualification should be enfranchised, and not only the wives of the higher property qualification.

C70. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* What I am anxious to get at is this—whether you attach importance to the point which I am putting to you, namely, a well-proportioned distribution of the women's voting strength throughout the population, or whether you merely attach importance to the proportion of the man voter as against the woman voter ?

Lady Layton : Attach importance to both those factors but we think that the women's interests for the moment are sufficiently safeguarded on this particular question. If you have a sufficient number of women enfranchised in all the districts for them to represent the other women, the women who are not enfranchised, we would like to see it as low as possible and if

*Minutes of Evidence, Vol. II-C, 26th July 1933. p. 2276.

it is put at a certain place now we would like it to be moved as soon as practically possible. We ourselves would certainly wish to see it as low as possible. We would be prepared to ask for adult franchise, if it were practically possible, but we realise it is not administratively possible.

C71. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* Might I put the same point in a somewhat different manner ? Of course, all women are interested in matters of social welfare ; that is quite true. The woman's point of view may be quite common, but you will also realise that schemes of social welfare are going to cost money, if they are to be put through and that would require taxation ?

Lady Layton : Yes, I quite appreciate it would.

C72. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* And all women may not take the same point of view with regard to that ; they are likely to divide on the basis of the class to which they belong ?

Lady Layton : Yes, I can give you two answers to that. First of all, take the education point of view. If you have a certain amount of money to divide on education, women of every class would agree that it should be spent equally on men and women, whereas, if you have not got women with sufficient pressure to bear, you will still go on spending a great deal more on the boys than on the girls. In the first place, that is one of the things that has to be seen to. Also, I would say this : The women of all classes who are taking any active interest in welfare are pressing that there should be a larger proportion of finances spent on education. I think you could safely trust to the women of most classes to take that line at the present moment, but I should be very glad to see the franchise taken as near as possible, and that is why I do lay particular importance upon the literacy qualification. Any woman who is intelligent enough to be of any value to bring any pressure to bear at all can make herself literate within a reasonable period and if you have the literacy qualification, and any section of women feel strongly that the section of women which has the vote, is not taking the vote, they have the weapon in their hands, and it is for that reason that I have always been so strongly in favour of literacy, and it is for that reason that all the organised women of India are also, in favour of literacy.

C73. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* I am satisfied, as long as you see my point of view. Sir Philip Hartog, I just want to ask you a question about literacy. We have really no information as to what the administrative difficulties are, as they are alleged to be, against! adopting literacy as a test for the franchise in the case of women, but what I understand the difficulties to be are these : First of all, it is suggested that there are no certificates available which would enable a registration officer, offhand, to satisfy himself that a woman falls within the category required under literacy, and therefore, would in the position to be put on the roll offhand. That being the case, we shaft have to adopt the procedure suggested in the proposals, that a village officer should

examine and his certificate should be countersigned by a tahsildar. I think the administrative difficulty that is suggested is this : How is a village officer to approach a woman in the village to find out whether she is literate or not ? Would you make it depend upon the woman who wants to get her vote having to approach and make an application ?

Sir Philip Hartog : I think that is the only possible way. She would have to have sufficient interest to say, either herself or through her husband : "I wish to be placed on the roll ; I am literate and am willing to be tested."

C74. *Mr. Butler :* How does that difter from application ?

Lady Layton : I do not think we have objected to application on the part of literacy in our Memorandum. We do not object. We think that the people who are already recognised as literate in any educational qualification that is admitted should be put automatically on the roll. Beyond that it must be a matter of application.

C75. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* So really this objection raised on the basis of inquiries made in households, which might be objectionable, would not arise ?

Sir Philip Hartog : May I just say, it seems to me to be an appropriate point to make reference to two answers of the Secretary of State bearing directly upon the point which has been raised by Dr. Ambedkar. In answer to question 7437 the Secretary of State said : "In future, for future generations of girls or women, it will be a comparatively simple matter to adopt your educational registers and returns for electoral purposes, but in Provinces where that has not been done hitherto, there will be very considerable difficulty in doing it for the first election." Now, I should like to point out that if you read that with another answer of the Secretary of State, he says at page 817, question 7214 : "There will be no change for X years." In answer to the Marquess of Salisbury, he suggests that in the Act of Parliament he would say for X number of years there can be no alteration of the franchise. Consequently, it would be of little use to have a register for the second, third or fourth elections, if those second, third or fourth elections came within the period of X years. Let me take the question of number. The total number of literate women is estimated in the Lothian Report to be a million and a quarter. It is on page 86 of that Report. Of those, 3,45,000 are in Madras, with regard to whom there is no difficulty. That leaves over for the rest of India the relatively small number of 8,75,000. Now, if it was possible to put 3,45,000 Madras women on the rolls for one election, and that must have been done at some time or another, why is it impossible to put 8,75,000 women on the rolls for the whole of the rest of India ?

(10)

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Mrs. Hamid Ali on behalf of All India Women's Conference and two other Women's Associations

*C334. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :* Did you say there would be no difficulty about the Muhammadan households ?

*Minutes of Evidence, Vol. II-C, 29th July 1933, pp. 2314-21.

on the rules of the Order, was Upali, who had formerly been a barber, one of the despised occupations. So Sunita, one of the brethren whose verses are chosen for insertion in the Thera Gatha, was a Pukkusa, one of the low tribes. Sati, the propounder of a deadly heresy, was of the sons of the fisherfolk, afterwards a low caste, and even then an occupation, on account of its cruelty, particularly abhorred. Nanda was a cowherd. The two Panthakas were born out of wedlock, to a girl of good family through intercoure with a slave (so that by the rule laid down in Manu 31, they were actually outcasts). Kapa was the daughter of a deer-stalker, Punna and Punnika had been slave girls. Sumangalamata was daughter and wife to workers in rushes, and Subha was the daughter of a smith. More instances could doubtless be quoted and others will become known when more texts are published.

It does not show much historical insight to sneer at the numbers as small, and to suggest that the supposed enlightenment or liberality was mere pretence. The facts speak for themselves; and the percentage of low-born members of the Order was probably in fair proportion to the percentage of persons belonging to the despised jatis and sippas as compared with the rest of the population. Thus of the Theris mentioned in the Theri Gatha we know the social position of sixty, of whom five are mentioned above — that is, $8^1/_2$ per cent of the whole number were base-born. It is most likely that this is just about the proportion which persons in similar social rank bore to the rest of the population.

Just as Buddha levelled up the position of the Shudras and the low caste men by admitting them to the highest rank namely that of Bhikkus, he also levelled up the position of women. In the Aryan Society women were placed on the same position as the Shudras and in all Aryan literature women and Shudras are spoken of together as persons belonging to the same status. Both of them were denied the right to take *Sanyas,* as Sanyas was the only way open to salvation. Women and Shudras were beyond salvation. Buddha broke this Aryan rule in the case of women as he did in the case of the Shudras. Just as a Shudra could become a Bhikku so a woman could become a nun. This was taking her to the highest status then conceivable in the eyes of the Aryan Society.

Another issue on which Buddha fought against the leaders of the Aryan Society was the issue of the Ethics of teachers and teaching. The leaders of the Aryan Society held the view that learning and education was the privilege of the Brahmins. Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The Shudras were not entitled to education. They insisted that it would be danger to social order if they taught women or any males not

Holding that the Shudra was born to be servile, Manu made his laws accordingly so as to compel him to remain servile. In the Buddhist regime a Shudra could aspire to be a judge, a priest and even a King, the highest status that he could ever aspire to. Compare with this the ideal that Manu places before the Shudra and one can get an idea of what fate was to be under Brahmanism :

X. 121. If a Shudra, (unable to subsist by serving Brahmanas), seeks a livelihood, he may serve Kshartiyas, or he may also seek to maintain himself by attending on a wealthy Vaishya.

X. 122. But let a (Shudra) serve Brahmanas, either for the sake of heaven, or with a view to both (this life and the next); for he who is called the servant of a Brahmana thereby gains all his ends.

X. 123. The service of Brahmanas alone is declared (to be) an excellent occupation for a Shudra; for whatever else besides this he may perform will bear him no fruit.

X. 124. They must allot to him out of their own family (property) a suitable maintenance, after considering his ability, his industry, and the number of those whom he is bound to support.

X. 125. The remnants of their food must be given to him, as well as their old household furniture.

Manu can hardly be said to be more tender to women than he was to the Shudra. He starts with a low opinion of women. Manu proclaims :

II. 213. It is the nature of women to seduce men in this (world); for that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.

II. 214. For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger.

II. 215. One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother sister or daughter; for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man.

IX. 14. Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; (thinking), '(It is enough that) he is a man ', they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.

IX. 15. Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this (world).

IX. 16. Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid in them at the creation, to be such, (every) man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

IX. 17. (When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) bed, (of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct.

The laws of Manu against women are of a piece with this view. Women are not to be free under any circumstances. In the opinion of Manu :—

IX. 2. Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control.

IX. 3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.

IX. 5. Women must particularly be gurded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); for, if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families.

IX. 6. Considering that the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives.

V. 147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

V. 148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

V. 149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible. Woman is not to have a right to divorce.

IX. 45. The husband is declared to be one with the wife, which means that there could be no separation once a woman is married. Many Hindus stop here as though this is the whole story regarding Manu's law of divorce and keep on idolizing it by comforting their conscience by holding out the view that Manu regarded marriage as sacrament and therefore did not allow divorce. This of course is far from the truth. His law against divorce had a very different motive. It was not to tie up a man to a woman but it was to tie up the woman to a man and to leave the man free. For Manu does not prevent a man for giving up his wife. Indeed he not only allows him to abandon his wife but he also permits him to sell her. But what he does is to prevent the wife from becoming free. See what Manu Says :

IX. 46. Neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband.

The meaning is that a wife, sold or repudiated by her husband, can never become the legitimate wife of another who may have bought or received her after she was repudiated. If this is not monstrous nothing can be. But Manu was not worried by considerations of justice or injustice of his laws. He wanted to deprive women of the freedom she had under the Buddhistic regime. He knew, by her misuse of her liberty, by her willingness to marry the Shudra that the system of the gradation of the Varna had been destroyed. Manu was outraged by her license and in putting a stop to it he deprived her of her liberty.

A wife was reduced by Manu to the level of a slave in the matter of property.

> IX. 146. A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong.

When she becomes a widow Manu allows her maintenance if her husband was joint and a widow's estate in the property of her husband if he was separate from his family. But Manu never allows her to have any dominion over property.

A woman under the laws of Manu is subject to corporal punishment and Manu allows the husband the right to beat his wife.

> VIII. 299. A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil, and a younger brother of the full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo.

In other matters woman was reduced by Manu to the same position as the Shudra.

The study of the Veda was forbidden to her by Manu as it was to the Shudra.

> II. 66. Even for a woman the performance of the *Sanskaras* are necessary and they should be performed. But they should. be performed without uttering the Veda Mantras.
>
> IX. 18. Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskars are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras they are as unclean as untruth is.

Offering sacrifices according to Bramhanism formed the very soul of religion. Yet Manu will not allow women to perform them. Manu ordains that :—

> XI. 36. A woman shall not perform the daily sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas.
>
> XI. 37. If she does it she will go to hell.

To disable her from performing such sacrifices Manu prevents her from getting the aid and services of a Bramhin priest.

IV. 205. A Bramhan must never eat food given at a sacrifice performed by a woman.

IV. 206. Sacrifices performed by women are inauspicious and not acceptable to God. They should therefore be avoided.

Woman was not to have any intellectual persuits and nor free will nor freedom of thought. She was not to join any heretical sect such as Buddhism. If she continues to adhere to it, till death she is not to be given the libation of water as is done in the case of all dead.

Finally a word regarding the ideal of life, Manu has sought to place before a woman. It had better be stated in his own words :

V. 151. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives and when he is dead, she must not insult his memory.

V. 154. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.

V. 155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women, apart from their husbands; if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.

Then comes the choicest texts which forms the pith and the marrow of this ideal which Manu prescribes for the women :

V. 153. The husband who wedded her with sacred Mantras, is always a source of happiness to his wife, both in season and out of season, in this world and in the next.

V. 150. She must always be cheerful, clever in the management of her household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure.

This the Hindus regard as a very lofty ideal for a woman!!!

The severity of these laws against Shudras and women show that the phenomenal rise of these classes during the Buddhist regime had not only offended the Brahmins but had become intolerable to them. It was a complete reversal of their sacred social order from top to bottom. The first had become last and the last had become first. The laws of Manu also explain, the determined way in which the Brahmins proceeded to use their political power to degrade the Shudras and the women to their old status. The triumphant Bramhanism began its onslaught on both the Shudras and the women in pursuit of the old ideal namely servility and Bramhanism did succeed in making the Shudras and women the servile classes, Shudras the serfs to the three higher classes and women the serfs to their husbands. Of the black

deeds committed by Brahmanism after its triumph over Buddhism this one is the blackest. There is no parallel in history for so foul deeds of degradation committed by a class of usurpers in the interest of class domination. The collosal character of this deed of degradation perpetrated by Barahmanism is unfortunately not fully realized. It is concealed by those small monosyllablic words, Stri and Shudra. Let those who wish to get an idea of the enormity of their deed think, of the numbers that lie behind these two terms. What part of the population do they apply to ? The woman represents one half of the population. Of the balance the Shudra represents not less than two third. The two together make up about 75% of the total population. It is this huge mass of people that has been doomed by Brahmanism to eternal servility and eternal degradation. It is because of the collosal scale of degradation whereby 75% of her people were deprived of their right to life, liberty and persuit of happiness that India became a decaying if not a dead nation.

The principle of graded inequality runs through the whole of the Manu Smriti. There is no department of life in which he has not introduced his principle ,of graded inequality. For a complete and thorough exposition of it, it would be necessary to reproduce the whole of Manu Smriti. I will take only a few departments to illustrate how in the hands of Manu the principle of graded inequality became imbedded in the social life.

Take the field of marriage. Observe the rule of Manu :-—

> III. 13. It is declared that a Shudra woman alone (can be) the wife of a Shudra, she and one of his own caste (the wives) of a Vaishya, those two and one of his own caste the wives of a Kshatriya, those three and one of his own caste (the wives of a Bramhan).

Take the rules of Manu regarding the treatment of guests :—

> III. 110. But a Kshatriya (who comes) to the house of a Brahmana is not called a guest (atithi), nor a Vaisya, nor a Shudra, nor a personal friend, nor a relative, nor the teacher.
>
> III. 111. But if Kshatriya comes to the house of a Brahmana in the manner of a guest, (the house-holder) may feed him according to his desire, after, the above mentioned Brahmanas have eaten.
>
> III. 112. Even a Vaisya and a Shudra who have approached his house in the manner of guests, he may allow to eat with his servants, showing (thereby) his compassionate disposition.

In the house of a Brahmana, nobody except a Brahmin is to have the honour of being a guest.[1] If the Kshatriya comes in the manner

[1] The word guest is used by Manu in a technical sense and means a Bramhana who stays one night only see III. 102.

Appendix I

THE RIDDLE OF RAMA AND KRISHNA

Rama is the hero of the Ramayana whose author is Valmiki. The story of the Ramayana is a very short one. Besides it is simple and in itself there is nothing sensational about it.

Rama is the son of Dasharatha the king of Ayodhya the modern Benares. Dasharatha had three wives, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra besides several hundred concubines. Kaikeyi had married Dasharatha on terms which were at the time of marriage unspecified and which Dasharatha was bound to fulfil whenever he was called upon by Kaikeyi to do so. Dasharatha was childless for a long time. An heir to the throne was ardently desired by him. Seeing that there was no hope of his begetting a son on any of his three wives he decided to perform a Putreshti Yajna and called the sage Shrung at the sacrifice who prepared pindas and gave the three wives of Dasharatha to eat them. After they ate the pindas three wives became pregnant and gave birth to sons. Kausalya gave birth to Rama, Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata and Sumitra gave birth to two sons Laxman and Satrughana. In due course Rama was married to Sita. When Rama came of age, Dasharatha thought of resigning the throne in favour of Rama and retiring from kingship. While this was being settled Kaikeyi raised the question of rendering her satisfaction of the terms on which she had married Dasharatha. On being asked to state her terms she demanded that her son Bharata should be installed on the throne in preference to Rama and Rama should live in forest for 12 years. Dasharatha with great reluctance agreed. Bharata became king of Ayodhya and Rama accompanied by his wife Sita and his step brother Laxman went to live in the forest. While the three living in the forest Ravana the king of Lanka kidnapped Sita and took her away and kept her in his palace

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This is a 49-page typed copy placed in a well-bound file along with the MS of 'Symbols of Hinduism'. This riddle does not find place in the original Table of Contents. Hence this is included as an Appendix to this part.—Ed.

Note: Government does not concur with the views expressed in this Chapter.

intending to make her one of his wives. Rama and Laxman then started search of Sita. On the way they meet Sugriva and Hanuman two leading personages of the Vanara (monkey) race and form friendship with them. With their help the place of the abduction was located and with their help they marched on Lanka, defeated Ravana in the battle and rescued Sita. Rama returns with Laxman and Sita to Ayodhya. By that time twelve years had elapsed and the term prescribed by Kaikeyi was fulfilled with the result that Bharata gave up the throne and in his place Rama became the king of Ayodhya.

Such is in brief the outline of the story of the Ramayana as told by Valmiki.

There is nothing in this story to make Rama the object of worship. He is only a dutiful son. But Valmiki saw something extraordinary in Rama and that is why he undertook to compose the Ramayana. Valmiki asked Narada the following question[1] :

> "Tell me Oh ! Narada, who is the most accomplished man on earth at the present time ?"

and then goes on to elaborate what he means by accomplished man. He defines his accomplished man as :

> "Powerful, one who knows the secret of religion, one who knows gratitude, truthful, one who is ready to sacrifice his self interest even when in distress to fulfil a religious vow, virtuous in his conduct, eager to safeguard the interests of all, strong pleasing in appearance with power of self-control, able to subdue anger, illustrious, with no jealousy for the prosperity of others, and in war able to strike terror in the hearts of Gods."

Narada then asks for time to consider and after mature deliberation tells him that the only person who can be said to possess these virtues is Rama, the son of Dasharatha.

It is because of his virtues that Rama has come to be deified.

But is Rama a worthy personality of deification ? Let those who accept him an object worthy of worship as a God consider the following facts.

Rama's birth is miraculous and it may be that the suggestion that he was born from a pinda prepared by the sage Shrung is an allegorical glass to cover the naked truth that he was begotten upon Kausalya by the sage Shrung although the two did not stand in the relationship of husband and wife. In any case his birth if not disreputable in its origin is certainly unnatural.

There are other incidents connected with the birth of Rama the unsavory character of which it will be difficult to deny.

[1] Balakanda Sarga I. slokas 1-5.

Valmiki starts his Ramayana by emphasizing the fact that Rama is an Avatar of Vishnu and it is Vishnu who agreed to take birth as Rama and be the son of Dasharatha. The God Brahma came to know of this and felt that in order that this Rama Avatar of Vishnu be a complete success arrangement shall be made that Rama shall have powerful associates to help him and cooperate with him. There were none such existing then.

The Gods agreed to carry out the command of Brahma and engaged themselves in wholesale acts of fornication not only against Apsaras who were prostitutes not only against the unmarried daughters of Yakshas and Nagas but also against the lawfully wedded wives of Ruksha, Vidhyadhar, Gandharvas, Kinnars and Vanaras and produced the Vanaras who became the associates of Rama.

Rama's birth is thus accompanied by general debauchery if not in his case certainly in the case of his associates. His marriage to Sita is not above comment. According to Buddha Ramayana, Sita was the sister of Rama, both were the children of Dasharatha. The Ramayana of Valmiki does not agree with the relationship mentioned in Buddha Ramayana. According to Valmiki Sita was the daughter of the king Janaka of Videha and therefore not a sister of Rama. This is not convincing for even according to Valmiki she is not the natural born daughter of Janaka but a child found by a farmer in his field while ploughing it and presented by him to king Janaka and brought up by Janaka. It was therefore in a superficial sense that Sita could be said to be the daughter of Janaka. The story in the Buddha Ramayana is natural and not inconsistent with the Aryan rules[1] of marriage. If the story is true, then Rama's marriage to Sita is no ideal to be copied. In another sense Rama's marriage was not an ideal marriage which could be copied. One of the virtues ascribed to Rama is that he was monogamous. It is difficult to understand how such a notion could have become common. For it has no foundation in fact. Even Valmiki refers[2] to the many wives of Rama. These were of course in addition to his many concubines. In this he was the true son of his nominal father Dasharatha who had not only the three wives referred to above but many others.

Let us next consider his character as an individual and as a king.

In speaking of him as an individual I will refer to only two incidents one relating to his treatment of Vali and other relating to his treatment of his own wife Sita. First let us consider the incident of Vali.

[1] Among the Aryans marriages between brothers and sisters were allowed.

[2] Ayodhyakanda Sarga VIII sloka 12.

Vali and Sugriva were two brothers. They belonged to the Vanar race and came from a ruling family which had its own kingdom the capital of which was Kishkindha. At the time when Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, Vali was reigning at Kishkindha. While Vali was on the throne he was engaged in a war with a Rakshasa by name Mayavi. In the personal combat between the two Mayavi ran for his life. Both Vali and Sugriva pursued him. Mayavi entered into a deep cavity in the earth, Vali asked Sugriva to wait at the mouth of the cavity and himself went inside. After sometime a flood of blood came from inside the cavity. Sugriva concluded that Vali must have been killed by Mayavi and came to Kishkindha and got himself declared king in place of Vali and made Hanuman his Prime Minister.

As a matter of fact, Vali was not killed. It was Mayavi who was killed by Vali. Vali came out of the cavity but did not find Sugriva there. He proceeded to Kishkindha and to his great surprise he found that Sugriva had proclaimed himself king. Vali naturally became enraged at this act of treachery on the part of his brother Sugriva and he had good ground to be. Sugriva should have ascertained, should not merely have assumed that Vali was dead. Secondly Vali had a son by name Angad whom Sugriva should have made the king as the legitimate heir of Vali. He did neither of the two things. His was a clear case of usurpation. Vali drove out Sugriva and took back the throne. The two brothers became mortal enemies.

This occurred just after Ravana had kidnapped Sita. Rama and Laxman were wandering in search of her. Sugriva and Hanuman were wandering in search of friends who could help them to regain the throne from Vali. The two parties met quite accidentally. After informing each other of their difficulties a compact was arrived at between the two. It was agreed that Rama should help Sugriva to kill Vali and to establish him on the throne of Kishkindha. On the part of Sugriva and Hanuman it was agreed that they should help Rama to regain Sita. To enable Rama to fulfil his part of the compact it was planned that Sugriva should wear a garland in his neck as to be easily distinguishable to Rama from Vali and that while the dual was going on Rama should conceal himself behind a tree and then shoot an arrow at Vali and kill him. Accordingly a dual was arranged, Sugriva with a garland in his neck and while the daul was on, Rama standing behind a tree shot Vali with his arrow and opened the way to Sugriva to be the king of Kishkindha. This murder of Vali is the greatest blot on the character of Rama. It was a crime which was thoroughly unprovoked, for Vali had no quarrel with Rama. It was most cowardly act for Vali was unarmed. It was a planned and premeditated murder.

Consider his treatment of his own wife Sita. With the army collected for him by Sugriva and Hanuman, Rama invades Lanka. There too he plays the same mean part as he did as between the two brothers Vali and Sugriva. He takes the help of Bibhishana the brother of Ravana promising him to kill Ravana and his son and place him on the vacant throne. Rama kills Ravana and also his son Indrajit. The first thing Rama does after the close of the fight is to give a decent burial to the dead body of Ravana. Thereafter he interests himself in the coronation of Bibhishana and it is after the coronation is over that he sends Hanuman to Sita and that took to inform her that he, Laxman and Sugriva are hale and hearty and that they have killed Ravana.

The first thing he should have done after disposing of Ravana was to have gone to Sita. He does not do so. He finds more interest in the coronation than in Sita. Even when the coronation is over he does not go himself but sends Hanuman. And what is the message he sends ? He does not ask Hanuman to bring her. He asks him to inform her that he is hale and hearty. It is Sita who expresses to Hanuman her desire to see Rama, Rama does not go to Sita his own wife who was kidnapped and confined by Ravana for more than 10 months. Sita is brought to him and what does Rama say to Sita when he sees her ? It would be difficult to believe any man with ordinary human kindness could address to his wife in such dire distress as Rama did to Sita when he met her in Lanka if there was not the direct authority of Valmiki. This is how Rama addressed her[1] :

> "I have got you as a prize in a war after conquering my enemy your captor. I have recovered my honour and punished my enemy. People have witnessed my military prowess and I am glad my labours have been rewarded. I came here to kill Ravana and wash off the dishonour. I did not take this trouble for your sake."

Could there be anything more cruel than this conduct of Rama towards Sita ? He does not stop there. He proceeded to tell her :

> "I suspect your conduct. You must have been spoiled by Ravana. Your very sight is revolting to me. On you daughter of Janaka, I allow you to go anywhere you like. I have nothing to do with you. I conquerred you back and I am content for that was my object. I cannot think that Ravana would have failed to enjoy a woman as beautiful as you are."

Quite naturally Sita calls Rama low and mean and tells him quite plainly that she would have committed suicide and saved him all this trouble if when Hanuman first came he had sent her a message that he had abandoned her on the ground that she was kidnapped. To, give

[1] Yudhakanda Sarga II5 slokas 1-23.

him no excuse Sita undertakes to prove her purity. She enters the fire and comes out unscathed. The Gods satisfied with this evidence proclaim that she is pure. It is then that Rama agrees to take her back to Ayodhya.

And what does he do with her when he brings her back to Ayodhya. Of course, he became king and she became queen. But while Rama remained king, Sita ceased to be a queen very soon. This incident reflects great infamy upon Rama. It is recorded by Valmiki in his Ramayana that some days after the coronation of Rama and Sita as king and queen Sita conceived. Seeing that she was carrying some residents of evil disposition began to calumniate Sita suggesting that she must have conceived from Ravana while she was in Lanka and blaming Rama for taking such a woman back as his wife. This malicious gossip in the town was reported by Bhadra, the Court joker to Rama. Rama evidently was stung by this calumny. He was overwhelmed with a sense of disgrace. This is quite natural. What is quite unnatural is the means he adopts of getting rid of this disgrace. To get rid of this disgrace he takes the shortest cut and the swiftest means—namely to abandon her, a woman in a somewhat advanced state of pregnancy in a jungle, without friends, without provision, without even notice in a most treacherous manner. There is no doubt that the idea of abandoning Sita was not sudden and had not occurred to Rama on the spur of the moment. The genesis of the idea the developing of it and the plan of executing are worth some detailed mention. When Bhadra reports to him the gossip about Sita which had spread in the town Rama calls his brothers and tells them his feelings. He tells them Sita's purity and chastity was proved in Lanka, that Gods had vouched for it and that he absolutely believed in her innocence, purity and chastity. "All the same the public are calumniating Sita and are blaming me and putting me to shame. No one can tolerate such disgrace. Honour is a great asset, Gods as well as great men strive to maintain it in tact. I cannot bear this dishonour and disgrace. To save myself from such dishonour and disgrace I shall be ready even to abandon you. Don't think I shall hesitate to abandon Sita."

This shows that he had made up his mind to abandon Sita as the easiest way of saving himself from public calumny without waiting to consider whether the way was fair or foul. The life of Sita simply did not count. What counted was his own personal name and fame. He of course does not take the manly course of stopping this gossip, which as a king he could do and which as a husband who was convinced of his wife's innocence he was bound to it. He yielded to the public gossip

and there are not wanting Hindus who use this as ground to prove that Rama was a democratic king when others could equally well say that he was a weak and cowardly monarch : Be that as it may that diabolical plan of saving his name and his fame he discloses to his brothers but not to Sita the only person who was affected by it and the only person who was entitled to have notice of it. But she is kept entirely in the dark. Rama keeps it away from Sita as a closely guarded secret and was waiting for an opportunity to put his plan into action. Eventually the cruel fate of Sita gives him the opportunity he was waiting for. Women who are carrying exhibit all sorts of cravings for all sorts of things. Rama knew of this. So one day he asked Sita if there was anything for which she felt a craving. She said yes. Rama said what was it. She replied that she would like to live in the vicinity of the Ashrama of sage on the bank of the river Ganges and live on fruits and roots at least for one night. Rama simply jumped at the suggestion of Sita and said "Be easy my dear I shall see that you are sent there tomorrow". Sita treats this as an honest promise by a loving husband. But what does Rama do ? He thinks it is a good opportunity for carrying through his plan of abandoning Sita. Accordingly he called his brothers to a secret conference and disclosed to them his determination to use this desire of Sita as an opportunity to carry out his plan of abandonment of Sita. He tells his brothers not to intercede on behalf of Sita, and warns them that if they came in his way he would look upon them as his enemies. Then he tells Laxman to take Sita in a chariot next day to the Ashram in the jungle on the bank of the river Ganges and to abandon her there. Laxman did not know how he could muster courage to tell Sita what was decided about Sita by Rama. Sensing his difficulty Rama informs Laxman that Sita had already expressed her desire to spend some time in the vicinity of an Ashrama on the bank of the river and eased the mind of Laxman. This confabulation took place at night. Next morning Laxman asked Sumanta to yoke the horses to the chariot. Sumanta informs Laxman of his having done so. Laxman then goes into the palace and meets Sita and reminds her of her having expressed her desire to pass some days in the vicinity of an Ashrama and Rama having promised to fulfil the same and tells her of his having been charged by Rama to do the needful in the matter. He points to her the chariot waiting there and says 'let us go!' Sita jumps into the chariot with her heart full of gratitude to Rama. With Laxman as her companion and Sumanta as coachman the chariot proceeds to its appointed place. At last they were on the bank of the Ganges and were ferried across by the fishermen. Laxman fell at Sita's feet, and with hot tears issuing

from his eyes he said 'Pardon me, O, blameless queen, for what I am doing. My orders are to abandon you here, for the people blame Rama for keeping you in his house."

Sita abandoned by Rama and left to die in a jungle went for shelter in the Ashrama of Valmiki which was near about. Valmiki gave her protection and kept her in his Ashram. There in course of time Sita gave birth to twin sons, called Kusa and Lava. The three lived with Valmiki. Valmiki brought up the boys and taught them to sing the Ramayana which he had composed. For 12 years the boys lived in the forest in the Ashrama of Valmiki not far from Ayodhya where Rama continued to rule. Never once in those 12 years this model husband and loving father cared to inquire what had happened to Sita whether she was living or whether she was dead. Twelve years after Rama meets Sita in a strange manner. Rama decided to perform a Yadna and issued invitation to all the Rishis to attend and take part. For reasons best known to Rama himself no invitation was issued to Valmiki although his Ashram was near to Ayodhya. But Valmiki came to the Yadna of his own accord accompanied by the two sons of Sita introducing them as his disciples. While the Yadna was going on the two boys used to perform recitations of Ramayana in the presence of the Assembly. Rama was very pleased and made inquiries when he was informed that they were the sons of Sita. It was then he remembered Sita and what does he do then ? He does not send for Sita. He calls these innocent boys who knew nothing about their parents' sin, who were the only victims of a cruel destiny to tell Valmiki that if Sita was pure and chaste she could present herself in the Assembly to take a vow thereby remove the calumny cast against herself and himself. This is a thing she had once done in Lanka. This is a thing she could have been asked to do again before she was sent away. There was no promise that after this vindication of her character Rama was prepared to take her back. Valmiki brings her to the Assembly. When she was in front of Rama, Valmiki said, 'O, son of Dasharatha, here is Sita whom you abandoned in consequence of public disapprobation. She will now swear her purity if permitted by you. Here are your twin-born sons bred up by me in my hermitage.' 'I know,' said Rama 'that Sita is pure and that these are my sons. She performed an ordeal in Lanka in proof of her purity and therefore I took her back. But people here have doubts still and let Sita perform an ordeal here that all these Rishis and people may witness it."

With eyes cast down on the ground and with hands folded Sita swore "As I never thought of any man except Rama even in my mind, let mother Earth open and bury me. As I always loved Rama in words,

in thoughts, and in deed, let mother Earth open and bury me ! As she uttered the oath, the earth verily opened and Sita was carried away inside seated on a golden *simhasana* (throne). Heavenly flowers fell on Sita's head while the audience looked on as in a trance.

That means that Sita preferred to die rather than return to Rama who had behaved no better than a brute.

Such is the tragedy of Sita and the crime of Rama the God.

Let me throw some search light on Rama the King.

Rama is held out as an ideal King. But can that conclusion be said to be founded in fact ?

As a matter of fact Rama never functions, as a King. He was a nominal King. The administration as Valmiki states were entrusted to Bharata his brother. He had freed himself from the cares and worries about his kingdom and his subjects. Valmiki has very minutely described[1] the daily life of Rama after he became King. According to that account the day was divided into two parts. Up to forenoon and afternoon. From morning to forenoon he was engaged in performing religious rites and ceremonies and offering devotion. The afternoon he spent alternately in the company of Court jesters and in the Zenana. When he got tired of the Zenana he joined the company of jesters and when he got tired of jesters he went back to the Zenana[2]. Valmiki also gives a detailed description of how Rama spent his life in the Zenana. This Zenana was housed in a park called Ashoka Vana. There Rama used to take his meal. The food according to Valmiki consisted of all kinds of delicious viands. They included flesh and fruits and liquor. Rama was not a teetotaller. He drank liquor copiously and Valmiki records that Rama saw to it that Sita joined with him in his drinking bouts[3]. From the description of the Zenana of Rama as given by Valmiki it was by no means a mean thing. There were Apsaras, Uraga and Kinnari accomplished in dancing and singing. There were other beautiful women brought from different parts. Rama sat in the midst of these women drinking and dancing. They pleased Rama and Rama garlanded them. Valmiki calls Rama as a 'Prince among women's men'. This was not a day's affair. It was a regular course of his life.

As has already been said Rama never attended to public business. He never observed the ancient rule of Indian kings of hearing the wrongs of his subjects and attempting to redress them. Only one occasion has been recorded by Valmiki when he personally heard the grievance of his subjects. But unfortunately the occasion turned out to be a tragic one. He took upon himself to redress the wrong but. in

[1] Uttara Kanda Sarga 42 sloka 27.

[2] Uttara Kanda Sarga 43 sloka 1.

[2] *Ibid.,* Sarga 42 sloka 8.

doing so committed the worst crime that history has ever recorded. The incident is known as the murder of Sambuka the Shudra. It is said by Valmiki that in Rama's reign there were no premature deaths in his kingdom. It happened, however, that a certain Brahman's son died in a premature death. The bereaved father carried his body to the gate of the king's palace, and placing it there, cried aloud and bitterly reproached Rama for the death of his son, saying that it must be the consequence of some sin committed within his realm, and that the king himself was guilty if he did not punish it; and finally threatened to end his life there by sitting *dharna* (hunger-strike) against Rama unless his son was restored to life. Rama thereupon consulted his council of eight learned Rishis and Narada amongst them told Rama that some Shudra among his subjects must have been performing Tapasya (ascetic exercises), and thereby going against Dharma (sacred law); for according to it the practice of Tapasya was proper to the twice-born alone, while the duty of the Shudras consisted only in the service of the twice-born. Rama was thus convinced that it was the sin committed by a Shudra in transgressing Dharma in that manner, which was responsible for the death of the Brahmin boy. So, Rama mounted his aerial car and scoured the countryside for the culprit. At last, in a wild region far away to the south he espied a man practising rigorous austerities of a certain kind. He approached the man, and with no more ado than to enquire of him and inform himself that he was a Shudra, by name Sambuka who was practising Tapasya with a view to going to heaven in his own earthly person and without so much as a warning, expostulation or the like addressed to him, cut off his head. And lo and behold ! that very moment the dead Brahman boy in distant Ayodhya began to breathe again. Here in the wilds the Gods rained flowers on the king from their joy at his having prevented a Shudra from gaining admission to their celestial abode through the power of the Tapasya which he had no right to perform. They also appeared before Rama and congratulated him on his deed. In answer to his prayer to them to revive the dead Brahman boy lying at the palace gate in Ayodhya, they informed him that he had already come to life. They then departed. Rama thence proceeded to the Ashrama which was nearby of the sage Agastya, who commended the step he had taken with Sambuka, and presented him with a divine bracelet. Rama then returned to his capital.

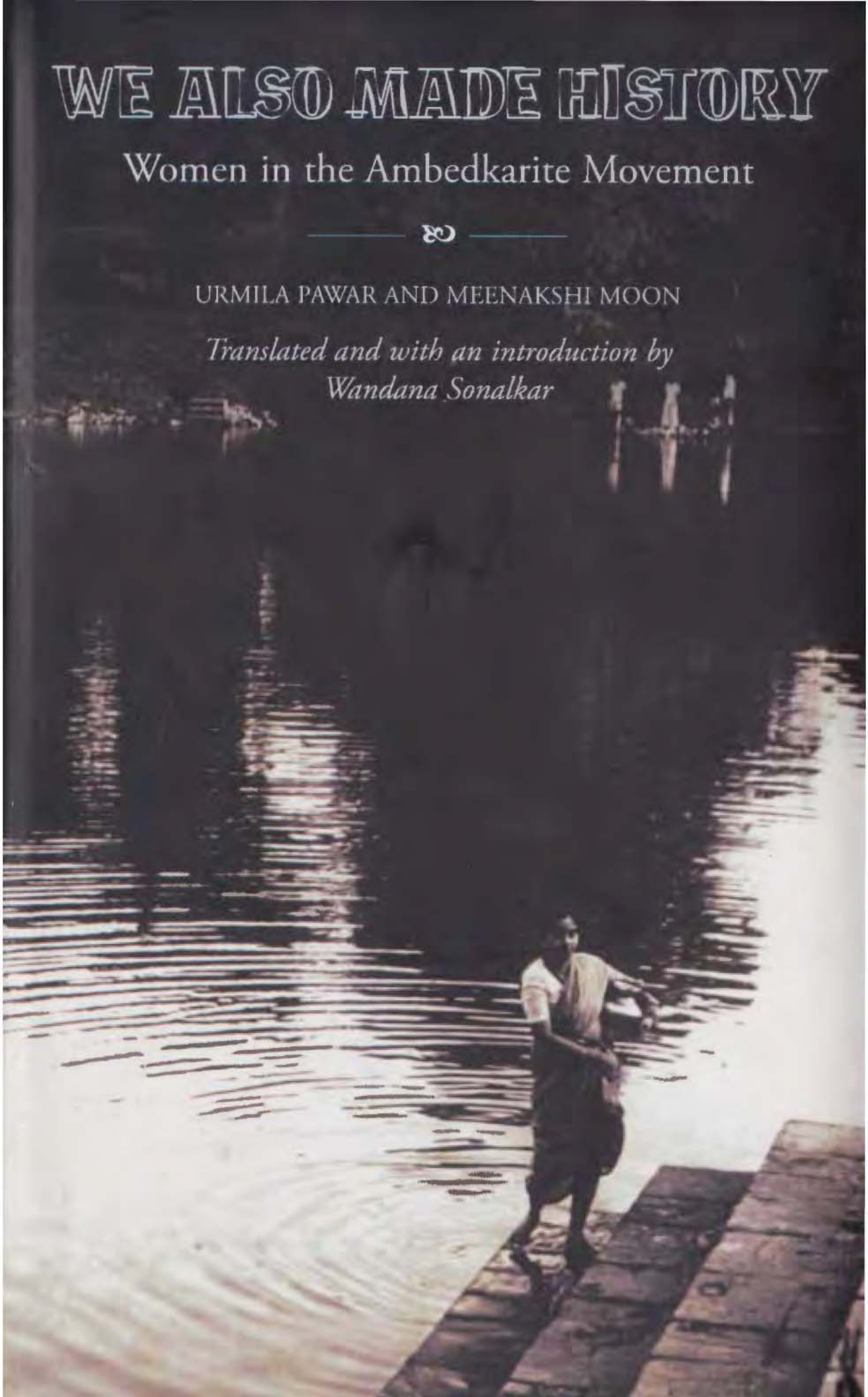
Such is Rama.

WE ALSO MADE HISTORY

Women in the Ambedkarite Movement

URMILA PAWAR AND MEENAKSHI MOON

Translated and with an introduction by
Wandana Sonalkar



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Translator's Introduction

"There were different stones down at the river for kunbi women to wash clothes, and different ones for the Mahaars.[1] I purposely washed my clothes on the kunbis' stone. Four of them came running in a trice and said, 'O Mhaarni, have your eyes burst or what? Can't you see it's the kunbis' stone?'

'Who are you calling a Mhaarni? So what if I washed my clothes there? Pour water on it and make it pure.' 'What a useless woman this is' they retorted. When they said this I ran and clutched the hair of one of them. I hated to be called a Mahaarin, it made me angry. There was a fight. There were four of them but I, alone, was a match for them. Then my father-in-law intervened and ended the fight."

My first verse I'll sing for Bheem
I'll be in the satyagraha *and I'll see him*
My second verse for him
Who gave us the right to draw water
For him, bai, we're happy in this van.
My third verse is for Ramaai's lord,
He made all the people like a happy bride.[2]

The reality of caste practice in village life in today's India is such that the incident narrated in the first paragraph, taken from one of the interviews with dalit women that form the second part of

this book, could still occur today—that is, if a Mahaar woman were to commit such a provocative act. Untouchability has not been banished from India, even though it is 'banned' by law. Separate settlements of dalits are still located on the boundary of a village, on a downward slope, so that water used by them for washing flows outside. Dalits are still denied access to village wells used by other members of the community; their use of common grazing lands and other public spaces is contested by non-dalits. Underlying these exclusions is a threat of violence. And it is the women who bear the additional burden of work, the additional threat of sexual violence, constantly in their daily lives.

Yet the first quote does record a moment of rebellion, a memory cherished by the woman telling the story to the authors of this book. She is Shantabai Sarode, a remarkable woman from the Nagpur region in eastern Maharashtra, who trained as a wrestler and was often called to settle disputes between untouchables and non-dalits. According to her narrative, she went to prison eighteen times. She is indeed a unique personality, even in a gallery of remarkable women; but in the pages of this book we will find several stories of rebellion, rather than the narratives of violence and victimhood that we have come to expect from dalit women. There are of course accounts of early marriages, of abusive and violent husbands, of ill-treatment at the hands of in-laws, as we might find in the lives of women of any caste. The social violence underlying the caste system is a reality they have to live with, and it is a subtext that runs through this book. What the book privileges, however, are the moments of overcoming violence, humiliation and exploitation, and the unique form of politicization that made it possible.

The second quote is from a song sung by women taking part in one of the satyagrahas[3] of landless agricultural workers carried out in 1964. Although some dalits in some parts of India own land, and not all the landless are dalits, dalits and adivasis — or tribal communities living in or displaced from forest land — make up the majority of landless agricultural workers. Some years after the death of B.R. Ambedkar in 1956, Dadasaheb Gaikwad led this movement of dalit agricultural labourers. Dalit women courted

arrest and spent time in prison, often with babies in their arms. The "Bheem" in the verse is of course an affectionate reference to Ambedkar. "Ramaai" is Ramabai Ambedkar, his first wife, referred to as "Rama-ai"—"aai" means mother in Marathi.

Dalit popular culture is full of references of this kind. The history of the dalit movement during Ambedkar's lifetime is a living part of dalit consciousness today, even as the generation that remembers Ambedkar's leadership grows older and gradually dies out. Songs about the struggles, about Bheem, about Ramaai who is venerated as a mother figure, are sung on various occasions when dalits, especially in Maharashtra, gather to celebrate, to commemorate or to protest. And yet, the specific and particular point of view of dalit women themselves rarely becomes a part of this cultural expression.

There are certain historical reasons for this. The Ambedkari *jalsas*[4] that were built up as a cultural medium of the dalit movement towards the end of Ambedkar's life and which flourished in Maharashtra for some time after his death, used elements of existing folk forms such as the *tamasha*[5] as well as religious forms, but their performances and their troupes did not include women. This was because the appearance of dalit women in tamashas had always been heavily imbued with the culture of their sexual exploitation, of their availability to men of the upper castes. The exclusion of women from the jalsa troupes was thus motivated by the objective of emancipating them from this history of sexual exploitation. Throughout his life Ambedkar endeavoured to bring dalit women into public life in a new role, as speakers and chairpersons in public meetings, as movers and seconders of resolutions, and as teachers. The numerous accounts of women performing this role, which we find in both parts of this book, should be read in this light.

The exclusion of women from the jalsas however, implies that the voice of the dalit woman speaking for herself has been largely absent from dalit popular culture even up to the present time. The few autobiographies by dalit women that have been published in the last two or three decades have been rare exceptions.

That is why this book gives us a unique opportunity to witness two kinds of self-expression by dalit women: firstly, our two authors as narrators of women's participation in the struggles of the untouchables, and secondly, as biographers and interviewers of women activists in that struggle. The first part gives an account of the participation of women in the Ambedkar movement and of previous struggles of dalits from the beginning of the twentieth century. The second part of this book has interviews and brief biographical sketches of some of these women. It should be read, firstly, keeping in mind that Ambedkar, like Jyotiba Phule before him, was very clear about the fact that the subjugation of women is central to the reproduction and sustenance of the caste system, and that thus, the emancipation of women, especially the women at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, is crucial to any struggle against caste and untouchability. And yet, accounts of the Ambedkar movement and its reflection in the culture of the dalits, its mythology, its songs, its icons and its stories of courage and sacrifice, have inadequately taken note of the point of view of dalit women themselves. Thus the text gives us an oblique angle, a cutting edge which can renew our understanding of the dynamics, the motive forces and the contradictions of that movement, and of man-woman relationships among the dalits, which are troubled by the way in which dalit women are used by upper-caste men to maintain the caste hierarchy. The text is also important because it is an account put into words by two dalit women at a particular point in time; it is *their* reading of this history, a script put out in the evolving scenario of how caste politics, which includes cultural politics, is being played out in contemporary India.

The two authors come from very different backgrounds — Urmila Pawar, the younger of the two, grew up in the Konkan, the coastal region of western Maharashtra. She knew poverty in her childhood — in her autobiography she recounts how her mother earned a scanty income by weaving cane baskets in their village, and then walking miles to sell them. Later on she went to college, married a man of her choice and moved to Bombay. She has published several volumes of short stories and her autobiography,

Aidaan (the word *'aidaan'* means 'cane basket' in the local dialect, and can also be read as 'mother's gift') came out a few years ago. Pawar is today fairly well-known as a writer and is active in women's organisations, including associations of dalit women. She came into contact with feminist groups in Bombay in the 1980s.

The Hyderabad-based Stree Shakti Sanghatana had, in 1987, published a collection of memoirs of women who took part in the Telangana movement entitled, *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in Telangana People's Struggle.*[6] The movement was led by the Communist Party of India and had organised peasants and agricultural labourers of the region in a struggle for liberation in 1948-49, initially against the Nizam of Hyderabad. The book was one of the earliest examples of feminist oral history to be brought out in India. Chhaya Datar and other members of a Bombay feminist group, Stree Uvaach, suggested that Pawar write an account of the role of women in the struggle for the liberation of the dalits led by Dr Ambedkar.

Meenakshi Moon, who passed away in 2004, lived originally in Nagpur in eastern Maharashtra, a city that had been a centre of organisation of dalits against social injustice from the early years of the twentieth century, and where today a community of prosperous, intellectual dalit families can be found. She was a part of the militant dalit feminist tradition of that region that is documented in this book. Meenakshi was married to Vasant Moon, editor of the *Collected Works of Ambedkar*[7] and author of a biography of Ambedkar and several historical accounts of the movement. Meenakshi Moon thus had access to the archives of the struggles, associations and efforts to bring about social reform among untouchables in the Vidarbha region, a collection put together by the lifelong efforts of Vasant Moon. Later, the Moons moved to Bombay. For several years, Meenakshi Moon edited a journal called *Aamhi Maitarani* — which means "we (women) friends", with the word for women friends written with a colloquial rather than a "correct" Marathi spelling. In 2002, shortly before her death, she also edited and published a collection of articles on dalit women in the Ambedkar movement. The two women, who

were deeply influenced by the dalit movement but were not trained academic historians, embarked together on a journey of rediscovering the past of that movement.

The first part of the book puts together a historical account of dalit women's involvement in the struggle against untouchability from the beginning of the twentieth century, through the period of Ambedkar's leadership from the 1920s to his death in 1956, and includes a chapter on developments after 1956.

For the second part, the two authors travelled all over Maharashtra and as far as Delhi, tracking down women who were mentioned in the historical accounts of the movement. This section consists of interviews with 29 dalit women who participated in this struggle, and life sketches of 13 who were already deceased at the time of writing the book.

The authors describe their undertaking in the preface: "The purpose of doing all this was to try and form a picture of the neglected, underrated woman activist of the Ambedkar movement: her capability, the history she had made in the most adverse circumstances, the change that took place in her because of that history, the way she was shaped and influenced, her longing for education and her deep feeling for the importance of education, her ethical integrity, her courage, and her development as an individual. We wanted to bring her contribution into public view."

Pawar and Moon say in their introduction that the task of seeking out these dalit women was difficult, sometimes frustrating: not all were willing to speak of their participation in the movement, some played it down, and their earnest attempts to speak with some prostitutes who had supported Ambedkar's movement largely failed. The project of tracing historical evidence of dalit women's political activity was also difficult, the authors say, as "the newspapers and periodicals of the time had virtually boycotted the Ambedkar movement and so news of untouchable activists, their work and the movement as a whole was rarely given much publicity." So the main historical sources they draw on are the periodicals and newspapers brought out by Ambedkar and his associates. In these publications, however, they found what they describe as an

"Aladdin's cave" of evidence. This implies that records of women's participation in the Ambedkar movement do exist in the contemporary literature of the movement. However, accounts of the Ambedkar movement written after Ambedkar's death in 1956 have not explicitly brought out the role of women; it was left to Moon and Pawar to undertake the first attempt of this kind.

Historians of the dalit movement have to rely largely on the periodicals brought out by untouchable leaders and reformers such as those mentioned below. Although newspapers and journals played an important role in political and social movements of the early twentieth century, their silence on the issues that most concerned the untouchables is significant; it is not for nothing that Ambedkar chose names like *Mooknayak* (Mute Leader) and *Bahishkrut Bharat* (Outcast India) for the journals that he started. And these sources too have to be combed fairly thoroughly to find mention of women's participation. Ambedkar of course was always aware that the awakening of the dalits to a consciousness of the injustice done to them in Hindu society would have to touch the women if it were to be effective. He was also aware that the caste system which relegated the dalits to the margins of society, also divided them among sub-castes which observed their own distinct customs and rituals, practised endogamy and followed hierarchies among themselves. To bring about unity among the dalits or even among the Mahaars would require a mobilisation of women. Thus the accounts of mass campaigns, protests and struggles as well as of meetings and conferences do explicitly mention women's participation. A considerable amount of space is also given to the issue of women's education. This is the "Aladdin's cave" that the authors refer to.

This book was first published in Marathi in 1989. Dalit politics in India has evolved in different directions and come to play new, important roles in the overall scenario since 1989. The last fifteen to twenty years have, in fact been almost momentous in this respect. We should, therefore, take a brief glance at some of these developments to better understand the contemporary significance of the work at hand.

Turning Point in the Politics of Caste

It was in 1989 that the Central government led by Prime Minister V.P. Singh took the decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission on the status of various castes in India and include the category of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in the schedule for reservations in educational institutions and government jobs. The word 'dalit', meaning oppressed, or literally crushed, is used to refer to those castes considered to be untouchable, and falling even below the shudras who occupy the lowest rung in the four-*varna* system of caste hierarchy. 'Bahujan', or 'most of the people', more or less corresponds to the category of shudras;[8] it is these castes who are included in the category of 'OBCs'.

Earlier, the dalits, or Scheduled Castes, and the Scheduled Tribes, who are the most marginalised groups in Indian society, had been given the benefit of reservations, initially for a period of ten years, but with repeated extensions of this time limit. The implementation of the Mandal recommendations triggered a shift in the focus of Indian politics that dominated the 1990s. A renewed consciousness about caste discrimination and the political assertion of several middle castes in regional politics, transformed the profile of parliament and state legislative bodies. The right-wing Hindu parties responded by taking up the issue of building a Ram mandir, or temple, at Ayodhya, the legendary birthplace of the god Rama, on the site where a mosque built in the time of the first Mogul emperor Babar then stood. The mosque was eventually demolished by an organised Hindu mob on December 6th, 1992. December 6th is the death anniversary of Ambedkar, a date of great significance for dalits: it is referred to as the day of Ambedkar's *Mahaparinirvana,*[9] since Ambedkar had converted to Buddhism just two months earlier after a long period of deliberation. The choice of this date indicates that the right-wing Hindus were hitting out at the dalits also, by contesting their space in the political calendar. These events virtually transformed the agenda of Indian politics.

After this, the continued existence of caste discrimination in Indian society even fifty years after Independence was, to some extent, acknowledged and the assertion of claims to political power by parties of the lower castes has since been an enduring phenomenon in Indian politics. New alliances were formed, regional parties also claimed their share of power at the Centre, and even trade unions and other organisations split along caste lines.

The formation of separate organizations of dalit women in the 1990s can be seen as a part of this new political scenario. We should remember that the writing of this book precedes these developments in time. It not only documents an earlier phase of the dalit movement, when women took part in struggles and organizational activity under the leadership of Ambedkar himself and his immediate followers (with some account of pre-Ambedkar consciousness and struggles); it is also *written* at a time preceding the recent political assertion of dalit women's separate identity. I would say that dalit women finding their own voice, initiating a dialogue with other feminists, giving their insights shape and translating them into an emancipatory programme, is a process which is currently under way. This book documents the historical roots of this process in modern times. However, the paradigm in which it is written belongs to an earlier stage of this process. It largely takes the ideology of the Ambedkar movement as given; it celebrates women emerging from the multi-layered experience of extreme caste exploitation in a language that follows Ambedkar and the sympathetic, but largely male, leadership of the movement. Even so, it provides us with personal testimonies, telling details about dalit women's lives, revealing glances of some of the most critical moments of the struggle of the untouchables, and insights into how gender politics and caste politics complement each other, but with some ripples of contradiction.

Dalit Women's Politics

Since the 1990s we have seen dalit women asserting themselves politically in a new surge of consciousness. They are trying to define themselves in relation to the dalit movement in

contemporary society, still largely dominated by men, and to a women's movement largely initiated and sustained by upper-caste women; and raising questions for both. Their critique of what they refer to as the Brahminical ethos of the Indian women's movement leads them to form their own organisations, articulate their own positions on various issues. Comparisons have of course been made with black feminists' critique of a largely white middle-class women's movement in the U.S. The political configurations are, however, different as well as similar.

One context of the dalit feminists' new mobilisation is related to what is referred to as the 'Mandir-Mandal' politics of the 1990s; one can read it as a form of identity politics, an assertion of difference, in relation to an Indian women's movement whose protagonists have been , in the main, urban, middle-class and upper-caste. The arguments here are similar to some of the positions taken up by black feminists in the U.S. : see, for example, this account of writings by the black feminist bell hooks: "In hooks' analysis black/poor women's oppression becomes more real, more relevant to political thinking. ....hooks suggests that those at the very bottom of the social hierarchy see more broadly the condition of society since they are not blinded by the rewards of that society and are consequently less committed to it. They are more in contact with the truth of society." hooks is also critical of white women who claim to speak for 'all women'; her strongest criticism is directed at liberal feminism and radical feminism; the former because it is blind to the race/class privilege enjoyed by white middle-class women, the latter because it is narcissistic.[10]

In India, the women's movement of the 1970s, while it involved mostly urban, upper-caste women from economically privileged backgrounds, had, from the beginning, strong links with communist and radical left politics. Many feminists of that period took up organisational work among rural and working-class women and among the adivasis — people belonging to forest-based communities and falling outside the Hindu caste hierarchy. One of the early national campaigns taken up by womens groups concerned the rape in a police station of an adivasi girl named

Mathura,[11] this led to changes in the Indian law on rape. One of the major assertions of the new dalit feminism, then, centres on the claim to self-representation: they are no longer content to have upper-caste feminists acting and speaking on their behalf. From the beginning of the 1990s, several dalit women's organisations have been formed.

The National Federation of Dalit Women was founded by Ruth Manorama in 1993. This organisation grew out of the public hearing on Violence Against Dalit Women in Bangalore that she organised that year. Ruth was also closely associated with the mobilisation of Dalits towards the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 1993. The argument that discrimination and social exclusion work against dalits in the same way that racism does with blacks, was not kindly received by the official Indian delegation to the Conference. Ruth Manorama has been an active worker of the National Centre for Labour (NCL), together with her husband, N P Samy. She has worked to bring all the independent unorganised sector trade unions under the NCL as an apex body. She has also been a core group member of the Asian Women's Human Rights Council.

The Dalit Mahila Sanghatna was formed in Maharashtra in 1995,[12] when preparations were on for the International Women's Conference in Beijing. Its objective was to assert the right of dalit women to speak for themselves on this international platform, implying that what they perceived as a Brahminical upper-caste women's movement could not authentically articulate their position.

The appearance of dalit women in international forums like the Durban Conference on racism in 1993 and the Beijing International Women's Conference in 1995 is a path-breaking new development. One issue at stake here is the assertion by dalit women of the right to represent their own interests, rather than being represented by upper-caste women, however articulate. We will see that this claim of the right to self-representation was also one of Ambedkar's concerns, when he pressed the demand for separate electorates for the untouchables. This claim has been the

common ground for the formation of several organisations of dalit women in recent times.

Another aspect of the same question was presented by Kumud Pawade, professor of Sanskrit at Nagpur University, at the Durban Conference. According to a report, she "described[13] the irony of mastering a language associated with Brahmin supremacy—a language that was not supposed to be heard by Dalits because it was the language of the holy scriptures". Kumud Pawade faced a lot of criticism when she took up the study of Sanskrit, and later was appointed lecturer in that subject. A young woman lecturer in Maharashtra stated in a meeting held a few years ago that one of her colleagues patronisingly remarked to her: "Oh, you speak Marathi very well!" When even the dalit woman's use of her native language in the role of college teacher is an occasion for surprise (and disparagement), the act of using language is itself a political assertion. It is at the same time about the right to use the language of the 'mainstream', hitherto used, shaped and controlled by the Brahminical elite, and the right to bring the language of the dalits, used by them in describing 'their' world, into the mainstream. Gopal Guru, a leading dalit intellectual and presently professor of political science at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, chose the title "Dalit Women Speak Differently" for his 1995 article on the formation[14] of new political associations of dalit women.

Brahminical religious practice excludes women of all castes, and non-Brahmin men and women, from reading the scriptures. Dalit women claiming the right to use language for their own, modern, purposes, is thus a highly significant and perhaps revolutionary act: different in essence from the "speaking out" of the early women's movement, and perhaps without an exact parallel in the politics of black women in America and Europe. Dalits and dalit women have, as we have seen above, begun to stand up to assert their right to use the language of international conferences, of advocacy and of human rights. They use personal testimony to bring home to the audience at these forums the experience of public humiliation, of sexual exploitation, of being forced to do the most hazardous, demeaning and menial jobs and

of being looked down upon because they do so.

The assertion by dalit women of the right to use language in public forums to give expression to their demands is a theme that runs right through the Pawar-Moon text, both in the historical narrative of the first section and in the women's biographies.

The issue of violence against women was taken up by the Indian women's movement initially with campaigns like that related to the Mathura case mentioned earlier. The demands of the movement resulted in some changes in the law, such as that on "custodial" rape, and brought dowry-related deaths into public view. Special police cells were set up in selected towns to deal with violence against women. Media coverage of the issue increased, and public attitudes gradually changed to some extent. The framing of a bill like the Domestic Violence Bill of 2005 would not have been possible without the painstaking efforts of feminist activists over a long period of several decades. Similarly, awareness about sexual harassment in the workplace spread after the Supreme Court judgement of 1997 on the Vishakha case, though implementation of the Supreme Court guidelines has, on the whole, been slow. One can, therefore, say that the feminist movement in India has had notable success in bringing the issues of domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace out into the open.

But violence, especially sexual violence, against *dalit* women, on the other hand, has in caste society always been a public issue. It is a permanently existing threat whereby upper-caste men assert their superiority over dalit men on a day-to-day basis. And it is a means to punish dalit women *or* men who dare to assert their rights by transgressing the norms of a society hierarchically divided on caste lines. We have numerous documented instances from the last forty years, down to the present, when *any* kind of rights assertion by dalits has been punished by sexual violation of the women. Prem Choudhary has documented some instances of romances between dalits and non-dalits (and, for that matter, Hindus and Muslims or just members of different castes) in north India being brutally punished by the killing of the couple. Dalit women have been victims of gang rape; they have been forcibly stripped

and paraded naked in villages. Anupama Rao in her article, "Understanding Sirasgaon"[9] has analysed one such case, dating from the 1960s, in some detail. The 'provocations' for such attacks range from disputes over land, to dalits' refusal to perform traditional menial services, to a decision by the Maharashtra government to give the name of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to one of the state's universities. Any real, imagined, rumoured or concocted story of a sexual liaison between a dalit man and an upper-caste woman can result in sexual violence against dalit women. Gabriele Dietrich has narrated instances of this kind from south India. In such actions the women suffer a double violence: on their community, and on their persons. The Public Hearing on Violence against Dalit Women[10] raised disturbing issues of this kind.

More than 90 per cent of all women workers in India work in the "unorganised" sector of the economy, where pay is abysmally low, work conditions often inhuman and security of employment and workers' social security are non-existent. The recent phenomenon of "feminization" of the labour force on a global scale, with deteriorating conditions of employment, men losing jobs and women being forced to work for lower pay and in worse conditions than before, applies also to India. Dalit women generally get the worst of a worsening situation. Even among women domestic workers, dalit women usually get the more arduous work of washing and cleaning, rather than being employed as cooks. The sanitation departments of big cities in India are still almost completely staffed by dalit men and women workers. Additionally, cities are kept clean by scavengers from the dalit castes; it is often the women and girls who manually sort through the refuse thrown outside homes, recycling what is usable. Although manual removal of human excrement was banned by a law passed in 1993, the practice still persists in many smaller towns and needless to say, it is dalits who do the work. Protective clothing and medical facilities are not provided. Some organisations have now[15] been formed to press for the implementation of the law.

Identity politics is also a part of politics; the creation of new symbols, icons and celebrations lays claim to cultural space.

Arguing that in India one cannot fight for women's liberation unless one challenges brahminical domination and caste hierarchy, several dalit women's organisations have, since 1996, celebrated 25th December as *Bharatiya Stree Mukti Diwas* or Indian Women's Liberation Day. This marks the anniversary of the symbolic burning of the Sanskrit text of the *Manusmruti* by Ambedkar during a collective mass action in 1927. After some initial hesitation, their lead has been followed by other women's organisations within and outside Maharashtra as well.

The act of burning the *Manusmruti* was carried out by Ambedkar in 1927 at the time of the *satyagraha,* or peaceful agitation, at Mahaad near Mumbai, when untouchables under his leadership reclaimed the right to use the water of a public tank. This action, and women's participation in it, is described in Chapter 7 of Pawar and Moons's book. The *Manusmruti* is the Sanskrit scriptural text, dated about the second century BCE, that lays down a code of behaviour for Hindu men and women. Besides being extremely patriarchal, it outlines the norms of a strict caste hierarchy and relegates the lower castes, or shudras, to a position of subjugation. Historians of the colonial period have pointed out that the British, by taking the *Manusmruti* as their reference point for traditional Hindu law, made rigid the codification of patriarchal caste hierarchy in India. Since then the *Manusmruti* has become symbolic of the traditional brahminical order, for its supporters as well as for those who challenge that order. When Dr Ambedkar, as Law Minister in the central government in newly-independent India proposed the Hindu Code Bill encompassing several progressive, that is, anti-caste and woman-friendly changes in the personal laws, or laws governing marriage and inheritance for Hindus, right-wing upper-caste Hindu opponents asked, "Does he think he is the new Manu?" while making disparaging references to his caste. More recently, we find political organisations such as the Bahujan Samaj Party, formed to represent lower-caste interests, referring to the *Manusmruti* as the source of the brahminical values that they consider are still the basis of a doxa[16] that governs upper-caste social practices.

There has indeed been an acknowledgment by several players in the Indian women's movement in the last decade or so that the questions raised by the dalit women's organisations are important and that the operation of gender inequality in Indian society is complexly intertwined with caste hierarchy. This is certainly an achievement of the new politics in which dalit women's agency has become visible and articulate. A large number of associations of dalit and 'bahujan' women have since sprung up—that is, of women from all those castes not belonging to the three highest varnas in the caste hierarchy. There are still certain tensions and contradictions, but a dialogue has been initiated within the Indian women's movement.

This dialogue is not confined to the theoretical understanding of the centrality of caste to the operation of gender inequality in Indian society. Dalit women's organisations are taking distinct positions on certain contemporary issues, and challenging the 'mainstream' women's movement's articulation of those issues. One recent example is related to prostitution and other forms of commercialised sex-related practices. In 2005 the Government of Maharashtra decided to prohibit licensed bars and restaurants serving drinks from hiring women to dance for the entertainment of customers. The government's motivation was typically puritanical-patriarchal: these dance-bars, said the Home Minister, pervert the morals of our young men. Women's organisations in Mumbai came out to protest against the ban, which has subsequently been challenged in the courts and revoked following a judicial decision. However, several dalit-bahujan women's groups, as well as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) supported the ban. There were heated and sometimes acrimonious exchanges between the two groups of feminists.

The main arguments of the women's organisations opposing the ban will be familiar to western feminists. 'Moral policing' by the state should be resisted; women have the right to earn their living in the way they choose; in any case, women today have little choice of occupation, and the ban would throw thousands of women out of work. The dalit-bahujan women's groups, on the other hand,

argued that the practice of hiring girls to dance (mainly in imitation of film stars in Bollywood films) in downmarket restaurants and bars was a fairly recent phenomenon, that this was a route that attracted girls, especially from lower middle-class families and the lower castes, first to a semi-respectable occupation but one which later led them into prostitution. These groups' response to the government ban was to welcome it, while rejecting its moralistic justifications, and to demand that the government make arrangements for the rehabilitation of these girls.

The important point here is that the two groups are placing their responses to the ban within the frameworks of *different feminist histories*. The first evokes 'the right to one's body', the individual's freedom of occupation, the resistance to moralistic control by a patriarchal state. There is also the designation of prostitution as 'commercial sex work', on par with other exploitative ways in which women have to earn their living. The dalit-bahujan groups, on the other hand, are aware that there are traditional, religiously sanctioned practices that sexually exploit women of the lower castes and that with the growth of modern cities, many of these women end up as prostitutes. (Pawar and Moon, in their very first chapter, present statistics showing that the majority of prostitutes in the cities of Maharashtra at the beginning of the twentieth century were from the untouchable castes.) Dalit social reformers, from the pre-Ambedkar period down to Ambedkar himself, have always demanded that dalit women reject these traditional practices and stay away from prostitution, even at the cost of economic hardship. The tamasha troupes where women of the lower castes danced for the entertainment of upper-caste men, existed in Maharashtra as a continuation of a folk tradition until a few decades ago. While these women enjoyed the protection of a feudal system of patronage, and some of them even attained some measure of renown as artists, the bar dancers, despite restrictions on sexual contact and body exposure, are constrained to perform imitative and titillating body movements in a degrading environment. The first group of feminists say that such descriptions of the bar dancers'

work are moralistic and judgmental; the second group are talking about the transformation of traditions in an increasingly commercialised society, where the enduring factor is the sexual exploitation of the women of lower castes. They reject the use of the term 'commercial sex worker' because this implies a freedom of choice of occupation, which has always been denied to dalit women in caste society.

We read in this text the story of early attempts to mobilise awareness in the untouchable community about the undesirability of practices like dedicating young girls to the temple god as devadasis or muralis.[17] We read of Ambedkar exhorting dalit prostitutes to give up their profession even if they have to suffer hardship. We hear the women in the oral history section tell us about the humiliation and insults they have to face when they venture into the public sphere as activists of the Ambedkar movement. In fact, a reading of the entire text is instructive for anyone trying to make sense of controversies between dalit-bahujan and other feminists such as those occasioned by the dance-bar ban. It is not so much the issue itself , or the different stances of different groups of feminists that I want to emphasise here, but the different perceptions of a complex situation in which women find themselves today. The subject of this book: the history of dalit women as seen by dalit women is very relevant to unravelling these contemporary debates.

This is even more important as changes in the Indian economy, the withdrawal of the state from many of its commitments to the welfare of the disadvantaged, and the expanding dominion of the market widen the disparities between the rich and the poor. There is not just economic inequality but a deep cultural divide. At the same time, the oppressed and marginalised sections of society are also being politically mobilised in new ways. The situation is fraught with tensions and possibilities.

Dalits at different times in recent history have looked to legislation and government support to create space—political, cultural space and the space of economic opportunity for a community that had always been almost literally marginalised,

forced to live outside the boundaries of a village, prohibited from entering temples, excluded from the arena of educational and political discourse. This was one of Ambedkar's greatest concerns. His position ran counter to that of Gandhi, who exhorted caste Hindus to undertake a "change of heart" in relation to the untouchables, or the liberal-communist faith that economic and political modernisation would erase the boundaries of caste. This is another theme that we can read throughout the pages of the Pawar-Moon text.

We should conclude this section on present day dalit feminist politics by mentioning another area in which dalit women are making new forays, again as a consequence of new legislation. In 1993, a Constitutional amendment introduced reservation of one-third of the seats in elected government bodies at local levels: in village panchayats,[18] municipal corporations and district-level councils for women. Within this one-third, the usual proportions of reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes also apply, with the result that dalit women are being elected to local government bodies, in some cases holding the post of sarpanch, or head of the village council, where these posts are reserved for dalit women. There have been conflicts here also. There are cases where the idea of a dalit women sitting in a chair, let alone *the* chair, at a meeting has been so abhorrent to non-dalit villagers that they have destroyed the furniture in the council office. But by now there is a mounting pile of instances where dalit women have managed to influence policy decisions in the councils. The cultural gain should also not be underestimated.

There has recently also been a resurgence of academic interest in dalit issues, and even in dalit women's identity, their experiences, their consciousness and their organizations: an area of study that had hitherto been of specialized interest, in which women scholars from outside India like Eleanor Zelliot and Gail Omvedt had done pioneering work. Gail Omvedt, of course, can no longer be referred to as a foreign scholar, having spent most of her life in India, based in the small village of Kasegaon in Sangli district in Maharashtra, with a lifelong commitment to dalits' and women's

concerns. Dalit and bahujan scholars like Gopal Guru, Sukhdeo Thorat, Kancha Ilaiah, have occasionally written about women's issues while Sharad Patil, a rebel from the Communist Party of India (Marxist), has placed caste and women's issues at the crux of his theoretical contributions. Scholars such as Ruth Manorama, V.Geetha, Anupama Rao, Susie Tharu and Sharmila Rege, have tried to explore how the position of dalit women in Indian society — 'triply-oppressed' because of their class, caste and gender — is critical to the way power configurations work themselves out in India's society, economy, politics, and culture. The work of dalit-bahujan women mainly writing in Indian languages, is being translated into English so that it becomes available to a wider readership: Pratima Pardeshi, Saroj Kamble, Rekha Thakur, are a few examples from Maharashtra. Pawar and Moon's text, a substantial work in terms of its size and subject-matter, should find its place among these initiatives and open up possibilities for further research and exploration of the past. I have tried to illustrate in this section how many of the issues that were central for the dalit leadership of Ambedkar's time continue to be relevant today: the question of the right to speak, and the right of self-representation in political bodies; the question of educational opportunity and of education as a path to emancipation of the dalits, the sexual exploitation of dalit women. These issues take on a new significance in today's political conjuncture, in which dalit women's organizations are staking their claims and adding their own angles.

Politics of the Ambedkar Movement

There have been rumblings of rebellion against the caste system in most regions of India throughout history: from the Buddhist era down to mediaeval times. The cultural revolt in colonial times in Maharashtra and some parts of south India from the mid-nineteenth century onwards has been documented by scholars like Gail Omvedt and others. However, the movement of untouchables under Ambedkar's leadership made a clear break with earlier anti-caste politics. This was because only he was

successful in drawing a huge mass following of untouchables, and he was the first to demand the right to self-representation for them. It is thus essential to read this book against the background of the politics of the untouchables led by Ambedkar. The period of Ambedkar's leadership of the movement begins in the 1920s.[19]

Before this, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Jyotiba Phule, the revolutionary social reformer, through his writings and actions had defied the brahminical order. He started a school for girls in Pune which offered shelter and education to Brahmin widows who became pregnant, and also admitted girls of the lower castes, including untouchables. Phule was of the Maali or horticulturist, caste, a fairly prosperous community in western Maharashtra although belonging to the lowest varna, the shudras. In his writings Phule analysed the causes of the poverty of the low-caste farmers, and bitterly criticised the Brahmins who tied them up in complicated religious rituals and encouraged superstition, profiting thereby as the only interpreters of the scriptures and performers of rites. He also wrote about the burden of work borne by women of low-caste farming communities, in contrast with high-caste women who had servants to attend to their needs. Phule, like his contemporaries among the social reformers of the upper castes, like Ranade and Agarkar, was influenced by western liberal thinkers. But his agenda was far more socially revolutionary, and he clashed with them on many occasions. The strong feminist current in his writings strikes the reader even today. He taught his wife Savitri to read and write, and later she trained as a teacher and worked with him in running the schools. Savitribai Phule is revered in Maharashtra for her pioneering work in women's education, and is becoming an icon for anti-caste groups and dalit-bahujan feminist organisations all over India.

Later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the non-Brahmin movement in western Maharashtra brought about the mobilisation of various lower castes under Maratha leadership against brahminical domination. The Maratha Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shahu Chhatrapati, did much to bring non-Brahmins into service in occupations hitherto the prerogative of the Brahmins. He also

employed untouchables in posts traditionally barred to them, and promoted education of non-Brahmins, including dalits. In 1906 the Maratha reformer Vitthal Ramji Shinde formed the Depressed Classes Mission which aimed at the uplift of the untouchables through education. He gained the support of prominent reformist Brahmins, and built schools and hostels for untouchables. Two early dalit leaders were Kisan Phaguji Bansode and G.A. Gavai, who were influenced by Shinde and formed the Depresssed Classes Association in 1915. These associations mainly aimed at the 'uplift' of the untouchables through exhorting them to undergo education, practice hygiene and give up undesirable social practices. Dalit leaders were also concerned with promoting unity among the different castes and sub-castes of untouchables.

Shivraam Jaanba Kamble of Pune, in his magazine *Somwanshi Mitra*,[20] started a campaign against the practice of dedicating dalit girls to temple gods as devadasis and muralis, which condemned them to a life of prostitution at an early age. Women too were writing in the columns of his magazine. The case of the murali Shivubai Lakshman Jadhav who wrote letters in response to this campaign, which were published in *Somwanshi Mitra* starting from 1908, is described by Pawar and Moon (see Chapter 5.) Kamble also appealed to educated dalit youths to come forward to marry the muralis; and Shivubai, as the authors tell us, was married to one Ganpatrao Hemantrao Gaikwad on 18th April 1909.

These early steps towards organisation of the untouchables had been in proximity to, and even drawing strength from, social reform movements in western Maharashtra. However, with the consolidation of British rule and the employment of large numbers of Mahaars in the army and, later, in the railways, other centres of dalit organisation sprang up. The two main bases of the Ambedkar movement were the cities of Bombay and Nagpur; Nashik became a centre somewhat later. More than half the women profiled in the second part of this book are from the Vidarbha region around Nagpur.

Ambedkar had returned from his studies abroad in 1917. Around 1920, in the debate centering around the Montagu-

Chelmsford reforms, he clashed with V.R. Shinde over the question of who was to represent the untouchables. Ambedkar was of the view that neither a caste Hindu not an untouchable chosen by a constituency with a caste Hindu majority would ever sanction the removal of the caste system. Hence he argued for separate electorates for the untouchables. From this moment onwards Ambedkar was convinced that the dismantling of the entire caste hierarchy was essential as against a 'reform ' of Hinduism from within to remove untouchability.

Ambedkar's leadership of the untouchables of the Vidarbha region was launched with the All-India Depressed Classes Conference held in Nagpur on 30 and 31 May 1920. Shahu Maharaj presided over the conference. In this conference Ambedkar openly declared his rejection of the politics of patronage, and also his distance from the nationalist Congress Party.

Vidarbha is the modern Marathi name for the eastern region of Maharashtra. The British constituted this region as Central Provinces and Berar in the 1880s. The Mahaars of this province practised weaving as a traditional occupation , besides their usual work as general village servants, scavengers and messengers. With the coming of cheap British-manufactured cloth in the markets, some of the Mahaar weavers took up petty trade in cloth, and the British record that many of them were successful. The first cotton mills in Nagpur started production in the 1870s, and Mahaars as well as untouchables of other castes were taken on as mill workers. Nagpur thus became a centre where Mahaars and other dalits were present in large numbers as an organised working class, and there was also a significant section of well-to-do Mahaars. Even then, they suffered various forms of caste discrimination, and untouchability was prevalent.

The untouchables of the C.P. and Berar province started organising for their rights in the early years of the twentieth century. In Chapter 5 we read how campaigns for the entry of untouchables into Hindu temples were taken up even before Ambedkar emerged as their undisputed leader. There were also disputes about access of dalits to public water tanks and reservoirs, a procession carried

out by dalits in Nagpur claiming the right to participate in the public Ganesh festival, and so on. There is mention of a woman, Tulsabai Bansode (narrative no. 4 in Part II) who was a member of the Mahaar Sabha as early as 1913.

In Chapter 7, we have an account of the early temple entry movements led by Ambedkar. From the late 1920s, Ambedkar took up the issue of temple entry, which was aimed at claiming acceptance for the untouchables within the Hindu religion. This was a continuation of earlier temple entry agitations in Vidarbha. Under Ambedkar's leadership, the famous temple entry satyagraha at the Ambadevi temple in Amaravati near Nagpur, the Kalaram temple satyagraha in Nashik, and the satyagraha at the Parvati temple in Pune all ended in defeat, since the Hindu community refused to grant the untouchables the right of entry that they demanded. But the importance for Ambedkar was that these actions succeeded in mobilising the dalit community in large numbers, all over the Marathi-speaking areas of the Bombay Presidency, as well as in the C.P. and Berar province, with a prominence of women among the satyagrahis.

However, it is important to note that the latter region, the Marathi-speaking part of which is now known as Vidarbha, remained in the earlier half of the twentieth century a centre of activity not only for the dalit movement, but also for the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS. These forces played on the contradictions between Ambedkar and his followers on the one hand, and the Congress Party led by M.K. Gandhi on the other.

The right-wing Hindu nationalist leader V.D. Savarkar had also supported the movement for untouchables' entry to Hindu temples at one stage. But an incident recounted in Chapter I of this book reveals that this support was mainly aimed at preventing untouchables from leaving the Hindu fold, and "re-converting" those who had embraced Christianity, for example. It also becomes clear that the Hindu temples were not, in fact, opened up for the untouchables.

Later, Ambedkar abandoned the temple entry movement, but we may note here that this agitation was not only staking a claim for equality of untouchables within the framework of the Hindu religion, it was also a contestation over the right to use public spaces. The satyagraha at the Chavdaar tank in Mahaad near Bombay can be more clearly seen as a claim of this kind. The municipal authority at Mahaad had declared all watering-places open to the public. The satyagraha was carried out by thousands of untouchables going to the tank in a procession, and symbolically touching the water of the tank. The upper castes later tried to claim that the tank was privately owned. Dalits in the procession were beaten up. This satyagraha was the occasion for a famous speech by Ambedkar specifically addressing the women of the untouchable community, and also for the burning of the *Manusmruti*. The content of his speech is given in Chapter 7.

We have seen that when Ambedkar emerged as the leader of the untouchables, there were already contradictions with other progressive Maratha leaders like V.R. Shinde, who had joined the Indian National Congress, over political representation for untouchables in self government arrangements being negotiated with the British colonial rulers. These contradictions continued to plague Ambedkar's relationship with the Congress, culminating in the stand-off with Gandhi over the Poona Pact of 1932. Ambedkar's demand was for separate electorates for the untouchables, rather than seats reserved for untouchable representatives of the whole constituency, where there would be the danger of the upper castes backing dalit leaders who would not truly represent the interests of their community. The principle of separate electorates for Muslims had found acceptability in the Congress as an alternative to the partition of the nation. Gandhi went on a fast against Ambedkar's demand, which he believed would divide the Hindu community, and in the end Ambedkar had to back down. One could see Ambedkar's demand in this context as claiming political space for the untouchables in the representative arrangements being negotiated with the British.

The failure of the temple entry movement and the confrontation with Gandhi were significant experiences that led Ambedkar to make his famous declaration in Yeole in 1935, that though he had been born a Hindu he would not die a Hindu. The announcement was a signal to his untouchable followers that, since the Hindu community refused to grant them religious equality, it would be better to leave the Hindu fold. However, 21 long years passed before Ambedkar actually took the step of conversion to Buddhism, and that was just a couple of months before his death in December 1956.

In Chapter 12 we read how women in meetings held in 1936 and later, welcomed Ambedkar's pledge to convert from Hinduism, and swore to follow him into any new religion he decided to enter. One speaker appeals to Babasaheb not to lead them into a faith that would impose the veil on them. She says that freedom of movement is important for dalit women. Ambedkar in fact studied various religions, and considered the possibility of conversion to Islam, before he decided on Buddhism. We have seen earlier how he saw the untouchables as a constituency distinct from both Hindus and Muslims, and so there were strong political reasons for his choice; but the women's opinion may have helped tilt the balance.

Women in the Ambedkar Movement

One of the first issues taken up for the emancipation of dalits by associations formed in the early 1900s was, of course, education. Moon and Pawar quote statistics of literacy among the untouchable castes taken from the 1921 All-India Census figures for the C.P and Berar region. The Mahaars were the only caste among these to have any significant numbers of literate persons: the literacy percentage was 1.9 per cent overall, and 2.6 per cent for men. Only 555 women were literate in a female Mahaar population of over 500,000. Of a female population of 450,000 in the Chambhar caste, 386 women were literate, and male literacy was 0.7 per cent.

Although Jyotiba Phule had made efforts to set up schools for dalits, including dalit girls, in Pune in the mid-1800s, upper-caste social reformers in Maharashtra had not in general much favoured

the education of untouchable girls and women. Schools founded by Christian missionaries did admit boys and girls of all castes, but even here the school managements often backtracked when they came up against strong reactions from the parents of students from the higher castes. D.D. Karve, who founded a school for girls in Pune, refused to admit untouchable girls because he felt it would harm his cause, which was to fight against the traditional ill-treatment of high-caste widows. The cause of education for untouchables was taken up by princes like Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur in western Maharashtra, and Sayajirao Gaekwad in Baroda, as well as by social reformers of the non-Brahmin movement such as V.R. Shinde.

In the Vidarbha region, as we have seen, there existed a class of successful traders and relatively wealthy persons from the untouchable castes around this time, and they took the initiative to set up schools for untouchable students early in the twentieth century. When Shahu Maharaj visited Nagpur in 1920, he too appealed to the untouchable community to pursue the cause of education. When Ambedkar took up leadership, he highlighted education as essential for the emancipation of the untouchables, and always emphasised the importance of educating women. He also became an ideal for the untouchables, a personification of what could be achieved by a dalit once he was educated.

The authors bring out quite clearly the fact that the education of women and girls was an integral part of Ambedkar's vision of social emancipation for the dalits. Some of his speeches made on occasions of historical importance for the struggle are quoted extensively, notably the speech addressing women at the Mahaad satyagraha, and the 1942 speech at the All-India Dalit Mahila Parishad held on 20th July 1942 in Nagpur. When women began to take active part in mass actions under his leadership, they first of all appealed to women to educate themselves and their sons and daughters. Further, some of them trained to be teachers, started schools, and managed hostels for dalit girls and so on. We read stories of many such women in the biographical section of the book, and extracts from their speeches in the earlier part.

A significant aspect of the narrative in this section is the naming of women who took part in various meetings and conferences during the 1930s and later. The content of their speeches is of course important, and, as the authors tell us, the act of going up on stage and articulating their views in public was a liberating experience and an achievement for these women. But the very mention of women's names carries a certain weight in a history of this kind. It is interesting to note that in the biography-interview section, many of the women interviewed also take pains to mention the names of other women who were involved in the movement with them. There is an act of solidarity in this naming, an act which the authors of this book carry forward into print. Reading this book, we should try and understand the significance for dalit women of becoming articulate, and creating a community through the speaking of names. Y.D. Phadke in his preface to the Pawar-Moon book objects to the preponderance of women from the Vidarbha region in the second section, and points out that some women who were important in the Ambedkar movement have not been named here. No doubt there are omissions; but we can look at the act of naming as an inclusive and affirmative, not an exclusive political process. Possibly, the inclusion of many women from Vidarbha is related to the fact that one of the authors, Meenakshi Moon, was from that region, and that both the authors therefore drew heavily on the archival material collected by her husband, Vasant Moon. In any case, as we have seen, the Vidarbha region, was an early centre of activity for the dalit movement in Maharashtra. The socio-economic condition of the dalits of Vidarbha, as well as their political history–of self-generated mobilisation rather than organisation under patronage–was probably more conducive to the emergence of militant women.

Pawar and Moon draw attention in the very first chapter to the issue of sexual exploitation of dalit women. They tell us: "Those girls from the untouchable castes, who as the result of poverty, ignorance and superstition were dedicated to village gods as devadasis or muralis, later turned to prostitution in the towns. Such girls were 'imported' from the villages into the cities." They

present census statistics to show that a majority of the prostitutes in Bombay city in the early 1900s were from the dalit castes. In the villages, girls who became devadasis and muralis would sometimes be under the protection of a specific (typically high-caste) patron, but they would be sexually available to others too. This practice was prevalent in some districts of north Karnataka, and in the adjacent districts of Maharashtra, such as Kolhapur, Sholapur and Sangli. It was a typical route whereby dalit women entered the class of prostitutes in Bombay. However, it is an essential aspect of the way caste hierarchy operates almost everywhere in India that men of the upper castes have access to the women of the lowest castes. Even in recent times, there have been incidents, not very rare, when the dalits in a village set-up have been seen as exceeding their place in the social order, and punishment has been enacted through rape or public stripping of dalit women.[21]

Ambedkar did, at least for some time, believe that untouchables had more hope of social justice in the cities, and he famously exhorted his followers to leave the oppressive social order of the village and seek their fortune in the cities. But the facts on entry of dalit women into prostitution belie this hope of the modernizing effect of rural-urban migration, at least for dalit women. Early efforts by untouchable social reformers called on parents not to dedicate their daughters to the gods, as we see in Chapter 5, entitled "Organising Against Religious Prostitution". The parents of daughters are being asked to exercise a choice. Ambedkar himself made moral appeals to the devadasis and muralis to give up prostitution, even though that would entail economic hardship. The practice is clearly seen, however, as one of the oppressive traditions of Hinduism and Pawar and Moon declare, rather bravely, that: "the custom of giving up girls to the god under the name of Devadasis, Muralis and Jogtinis came to an end by itself among neo-Buddhists after their conversion."

There are also accounts of youths in the Ambedkar movement coming forward in response to a call to marry devadasis and muralis. Ambedkar believed that the spread of inter-caste

marriages (between dalits and non-dalits) would be a way to eliminate caste. Chapter 6 gives an account of some such marriages conducted in the heyday of the movement. In its earlier phase, Ambedkar defied tradition by proposing that marriages of untouchables be carried out according to Vedic rites, which were forbidden to them according to the brahminical tradition, though in a simplified form, eschewing an excess of ceremony and cutting out rituals that were demeaning to women. Ambedkar did not have a worked-out programme of progressive 'self-respect' marriages as did E.V.Ramaswami 'Periyar' in Tamil Nadu in south India. Rather, the Satyashodhak wedding ceremony proposed by Jyotiba Phule was adopted by his followers, and adapted to incorporate elements of Buddhist rites after the mass conversion to Buddhism.

There were dalit women who performed in tamasha groups as dancers and singers. Ambedkar also took a moral stand against the sexual exploitation of these women. For example, when Patte Bapurao, the famous (Brahmin) song writer and tamasha group master offered to donate to Ambedkar's cause, he declared, "I don't want the money raised by making Pawalabai dance." As we have seen above, when the tamasha form was adapted by troupes of Ambedkar's followers in the Ambedkari jalsa, women were excluded, and the women's parts were played by men and boys.

In the Mahaad speech, Ambedkar calls on dalit women to be neat and clean in appearance, and to give up the styles of dress and jewellery that mark them as being from the untouchable castes.[22] Some upper-caste women, usually wives of Ambedkar's close high-caste associates, even showed the dalit women how to tie their saris after the fashion of Brahmin women. Again, we should remember that this is an earlier stage of the movement, when Ambedkar still sought equality and justice for untouchables within the Hindu religious community. Also, we can note a difference here between racism, in which the person discriminated against is marked by the colour of her skin, and untouchability, which imposes markers on the *atishudra,* the one who is lower than all castes, so that others can recognise her. These markers vary in their details

in various parts of India. Dalits have been forced to tie brooms around their waists to sweep away their polluting footprints as they walk, or to tie mud pots around their necks so that their spittle does not contaminate the ground. Dalit women have been forbidden to wear blouses with their saris, and in Maharashtra they were marked out by their wearing of heavy jewellery made of base metals. Casting off these signifiers of their subjugation and humiliation is a first act of rebellion, an act of self-respect, to use a term associated with the anti-caste Tamil leader E.V. Ramaswamy 'Periyar'.

One may here contrast the appeal made by Gandhi to women in the struggle for India's independence. It is said that when he called on women in the audience to donate their jewellery for the cause, thousands responded to his charismatic appeal. Gandhi's own practice of austerity inspired both men and women to follow his example, and he was responsible for bringing women out of their homes in large numbers as active participants in the independence movement. But Ambedkar, with his respect for liberal values, was sceptical about the use of charisma in politics, as he explains in his article, "Ranade, Jinnah and Gandhi".[23] His appeal to women in the Mahaad speech was essentially different: the call to give up modes of dress and ornament marked with a subordinate status was a programme for their emancipation. It is not just a matter of emulating the upper castes — a process named "Sanskritisation" by the Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas[24]—but of casting off the markers of inferiority. In fact it is clear that tying their nine-yard saris so that they draped gracefully at their ankles would not have been very convenient for women who had to do physical labour!

What is more, Ambedkar's position changed over the long period of time from his renunciation of Hinduism until he converted to Buddhism in 1956. I think we have indications that not only did he passionately appeal to his women followers to have self-respect, and to gain the boldness to speak in public and articulate their views, but he also actually listened to what they had to say, and was open to their influence. For example, let us

see what Meenambal Shivraj said at the third conference of the All India Untouchable Women's Federation held in Bombay on 6th May 1945: "Women of the untouchable community traditionally have the right to divorce and our widows can remarry; their situation is worsened by the fact that Hindu laws are imposed on them." Therefore, explained Meenambal Shivraj, Hindu customs and Hindu laws should not be applied to us.

In his journey from the claim to equality and justice for untouchables within Hinduism, to his renunciation of Hinduism in 1956, Ambedkar had an ear for the voice of the dalit women who were at the bottom of the caste-patriarchal hierarchy under Hinduism. After his central role in the framing of the Constitution of the new Indian nation, when he was Law Minister in the Union Government in the late 1940s, he drew up the Hindu Code Bill, which aimed at reforming personal laws for Hindus. Ambedkar felt that it was as important to frame a code for laws of marriage, adoption, divorce and inheritance based on equality among castes and between men and women as it was to frame a constitution based on equality of citizenship. He studied existing traditional Hindu laws regarding marriage and inheritance and made woman-friendly modifications to ensure, for example, monogamy, the right of divorce for women and recognition of inter-caste Hindu marriages. He resigned as Law Minister when the Bill was defeated after vehement opposition from orthodox upper-caste Hindu men in Parliament, although he had the support of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and of women in the Congress Party. Later, some of the laws he proposed were passed separately.

After 1956

The final chapter of the first section of Pawar and Moon's book gives an account of political developments after Ambedkar's death on December 6, 1956. We will note just two points here. The agitation for giving Ambedkar's name to Marathwada University in Aurangabad, where he had established colleges to promote higher education among the dalits, is discussed in this chapter with incidents of women's participation. The agitation became a mass

movement after 1978, when the Government of Maharashtra passed the decision to rename the university, but hesitated to implement it in the face of violent opposition from caste Hindus of the region. Attacks on dalits, including setting their huts on fire, lynchings and molestation of women, spread through the villages of the region in 1978, fanned by partisan writings in some local newspapers. The issue was posed as one of regional identity *Marathwadyachi asmita*[25] versus dalit identity *dalitaanchi asmita*. During the period from 1978 to the actual renaming in 1994, the demand for *naamaantar* — renaming — became a rallying point for pro-dalit forces in Maharashtra. One may note that the government dared to change the name of the university to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University only after the shift in the scenario of Indian politics I have referred to above, terming the name change as *naamavistaar* — name expansion — rather than renaming.

This final chapter also talks about the conversion of dalits to Buddhism. Thousands changed their religion following Ambedkar on October 14th 1956; but the numbers grew after his death, reaching two million by the time of the 1961 Census. Some of the interviews in the second section give valuable insights into what converting to Buddhism actually meant for dalit women who had taken part in the Ambedkar movement. There is the testimony of Meera Ambedkar, Dr. Ambedkar's daughter-in-law, for example who says she has no taste for politics but carries on her father-in-law's work through her religion, and two *bhikkunis*, or women who chose to live their lives as Buddhist mendicants. These give us glimpses of what the search for identity, for dignity in the most adverse circumstances means for these women of modern India.

Conclusion

To conclude, this book is a path-breaking beginning in a field that is rich in research possibilities, a text that can provoke many questions. It is primarily a work of history, but it also tells us how history becomes a part of culture, and is blended with myth and with ideology to shape new identities and bring confidence to an oppressed section of society. It also tells us, I think, why cultural

politics is important for the dalits in India today. In translating this text I have tried to retain the flavour of the original. The interview/ biographical section will hold a unique interest for readers. Some of the women interviewed have since passed away; the interviews therefore constitute an important exercise in oral documentation. As the authors tell us in their preface, several dalit women have in the last couple of decades published their biographies, Urmila Pawar herself being among them. Some of these have been translated into English.

The experience and struggles of women in the Ambedkar movement intersect with India's path to modernity in ways that throw up disturbing questions about how social change takes place in this society. The parallels with black women in the U.S. are of course striking, but the relationship of caste and patriarchy in India has its own specific complexities. It is hoped that this translation will contribute to opening up this area for many readers across the world.

Wandana Sonalkar,
Alochana

Endnotes

1. The Mahaars are the most numerous dalit caste in Maharashtra. Like other dalit castes, they live on the boundaries of the village. Their traditional duties include defence of village boundaries, removing carcasses of dead animals, and carrying messages between villages, especially news of deaths. They are generally regarded as a class of village servants. Maatangs are rope and basket-makers, (and hangmen). They are also supposed to protect other villagers from inauspicious or evil forces by absorbing these themselves. The Chambhaars are leather workers and makers of footwear. The Bhangis are sweepers and sanitation workers. These are Marathi caste names, their counterparts in other parts of India are differently named. All these castes are considered polluting because of their contact with polluting objects and forces.
2. From song sung by Ambedkarite women who took part in the *satyagrahas* of landless workers in 1964.
3. The term *satyagraha*, meaning a peaceful mass protest to assert a claim considered rightful, is generally associated with Gandhi, but is used frequently in this book to refer to agitations in Ambedkar's time and after.
4. *Jalsa:* literally, a gathering with songs. The Ambedkarite *jalsa* was an adaptation of this traditional form for social awakening and political mobilisation among Dalits. As we have noted, no women took part in these *jalsas*.
5. *Tamasha:* a form of folk theatre which came into existence around the 16th century in Maharashtra. It includes the popular love song form 'lavani', and features satirical skits and several characteristic musical instruments. It is associated with and performed by members of the Kolhati and Mahaar communities.
6. Stree Shakti Sanghatana (1987) *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in Telangana People's Struggle*, New Delhi: Kali for Women.
7. Ambedkar, B.R.: Collected Works, published by the Government of Maharashtra. In particular, see *Ranade, Jinnah and Gandhi;* and *The Annihilation of Caste.*
8. *Shudras:* the lowest *varna* in the four-*varna* caste system, whose duty is to serve the other three castes. Untouchables are sometimes called *atishudras*, and considered to be lower even than the *shudras*.
9. *Mahaparinirvana:* the term originates from Buddhism, and is used to describe the state of enlightenment reached by the Buddha at the time of his death. Neo-Buddhists in India use it to refer to Ambedkar's death on December 6th, 1956.
10. hooks, bell (2000), *Feminism is for Everyone: Passionate Politics*, Pluto Press, UK.
11. *Adivasis:* the word means 'original inhabitants'. It is used to denote forest people or members of what the Constitution refers to as the Scheduled Tribes.
12. *Women Together* (2006), online journal, 24 February 2006.
13. Pawade, Kumud, *Antahsphot*, Nagpur.
14. Guru, Gopal (1995) "Dalit Women Talk Differently", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 14-21 (reproduced in Rao, see below.)
15. Ramaswamy, Gita (2006), *India Stinking*, Navayana, Chennai.
16. Doxa: Pierre Bourdieu, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1997), used the term doxa to denote what is taken for granted in any particulat society. The doxa, in his

view, is the experience by which "the natural and social world appears as self-evident" (1997:164).

17. *Devadasi* and *murali* are terms describing the practice of dediating girls to a temple god when they are children. Later the girls are taught to sing and dance, and also have to perform sexual service. It is usually girls from the 'lower' castes who are dedicated in this way.
18. *Panchayat:* village council; there are also *jaat panchayats,* or caste councils, typically highly patiarchal bodies presided over by the male elders of the caste community. The word has also been used to denote elected local government bodies.
19. Kosare, D.L. (1984), *Vidarbhateel Dalitaanchi Chalval,* Dnyaanpradep, Nagpur.
20. Somwanshi is a caste name referring to the Mahaars, associated with myths of origin of the caste and later used for a hierarchically superior sub-caste among the Mahaars.
21. Rao, Anupama (200), " Understanding Sirasgaon", in Rao, Anupama, (ed.) 2003, *Gender and Caste,* Kali for Women, New Delhi.
22. Dalit women typically wore jewellery made of base metals, and tied their nine-yard saris well above the knees. This form of dress enabled them to do physical labour, but also made possible a less restricted deportment in general. Ambedkar's speech is given in Chapter 7.
23. Ambedkar, B.R.: *Ranade, Jinnah and Gandhi* (see below).
24. Srinivas, M.N. (1952), *Religion and Society among the Coorge of South India,* Oxford University Press.
25. *asmita:* This word has been coined as a noun formation from the Sanskrit word *asmi,* which is the first-person singular present tense of the verb meaning 'to be'. It is used in the sense of 'identity'.

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Authors' Preface

Stree Uvaach is a group that collectively writes and thinks about women's issues from women's point of view.

We decided to personally meet some women from the Ambedkar movement, and interview them, with a view to writing an article for *Stree Uvaach*. It was unlikely that we would find living women who had been active in Ambedkar's time. We had some women who had worked for the Republican Party and so on, in mind. There were doubts in our minds; what will we really get out of interviews with these women? Still, (we thought) why not note down the experiences of those women who had ventured out of their homes for a specific purpose? With this objective we decided to visit not only places like Bombay, Nashik, Pune, Nagpur, Akola, Amaravati, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, but also Delhi and other major cities.

The period between the Mahaad satyagraha of 1927 and the religious conversion of 1956, is generally known as the time of "the Ambedkar movement, of Babasaheb's leadership". We were going to investigate the work done by women in this period of time.

We had read books, articles, biographies of Babasaheb, as well as letters, speeches and other such literature on the Ambedkar movement written by C.B. Khairmode, Dhananjay Keer,

Gangadhar Pantawane, Vasant Moon, Dr. Bhalchandra Phadke, Shankarrao Kharat, Zumbarlal Kamble and others.

However, in all this literature nothing much was recorded about women's participation. It was unlikely that women who had taken part in the satyagrahas in Amaravati, Pune, Mahaad and Nashik would still be alive. So we had in our minds the prospect of interviewing women in the post-Ambedkar movement, that is from the period after the conversion to Buddhism, and starting to investigate the work of women in the Ambedkar movement from there.

We fixed on interviewing women aged over fifty, who would be expected to have had some role in the journey leading to the conversion. We got down to the business of taking interviews, proposing to obtain information about deceased woman activists from their living relatives.

We found Shantabai Shinde (Bhalerao), who was a schoolgirl at the time, to be the only woman witness to the Chavdaar Lake Satyagraha who was still living. Similarly, the only woman we could interview from the Kalaram Mandir satyagraha at Nashik was Ramabai Gaikwad. The number of women who had started their activities in the executive committee of the Dalit Mahila Federation, or who had been active in the Poona Pact satyagraha, the conversion, and later in the Republican Party, the satyagraha of the landless and the movement for renaming Marathwada University, was much larger.

To interview these women, we visited lanes and byways, *chawls* and slums on foot; we had to travel long distances by day and night, in the heat and in rain, taking our meals as we could, and at the same time taking care of our usual daily chores. Wherever we went, the sisters we encountered greeted us with affection, friendship, patience and a sense of solidarity.

Sometimes a sister was not available even though we had made an appointment; sometimes the women reported as having been active in the movement turned out to have made no contribution. At times a woman herself would tell us, "Bai, you are mistaken. I am not the woman you are looking for," or, "I am not an activist."

Some educated activists told us that they intended to place a full account of their activities before the public in their own autobiographies.

When we visited Savita (Mai) Ambedkar, she too told us that her autobiography was being published. We had felt that an interview with her would be important as that of a woman activist who could give information about the Ambedkar movement during the days when Babasaheb lived in Delhi. But that was not to be.....

We interviewed women who had had a close involvement with the Ambedkar movement. We visited the homes of Babasaheb's dedicated activists like Dadasaheb Gaikwad and Rajbhoj, now deceased, but we did not get the response we needed. We have reworked the information we collected from the interviews and other sources in the first part of this book.

Some prostitutes from the Kamathipura and Saatrasta areas in Bombay, together with an activist named David, had worked side by side with Babasaheb in opposing Gandhi's position in the Round Table conference. We met some political workers to see if we could find one or two who could recall those days or who had worked to spread Ambedkar's ideas.

We made inquiries with Pratima Joshi, who now works for the rehabilitation of the children of prostitutes, but we could not get the information we wanted.

The women activists we met told us about other women activists, just as the flames of torches are lit from hand to hand in a procession. In this way we met more and more women workers of the movement. We went on meeting them with growing enthusiasm.

It was necessary to cross-check the information we received from these women, especially the dates, times, occasions and subjects of meetings and conferences, from contemporary sources. Of course, the newspapers and periodicals of the time had virtually boycotted the Ambedkar movement and so news of untouchable activists, their work and the movement as a whole was rarely given much publicity. So we began to go through the newspapers brought

out by Babasaheb and some of his co-workers, and suddenly it was as if we had discovered Aladdin's cave. We found a large number of important reports and news items.

We were overwhelmed by the news we read in these journals. We became convinced that not only an article, but also a book based on research could be written on the work of women in the Ambedkar movement, and we began to work in that direction. We were fully aware that the data we were able to collect was like a snowflake on the vast surface of the ocean. A large part of the participation of women in the Ambedkar movement has been neglected even in the literature of the Ambedkar movement.

It was not enough to investigate the political movement and the social life of the time through newspapers; we had to form a picture of the contemporary social, economic, educational and religious situation. We obtained facts about the numbers of untouchables, the proportion of untouchables who had migrated to the cities, the numbers of women among them, the proportion of untouchable widows, the numbers of prostitutes, the numbers who had converted to Buddhism, and so on, during the period 1921 to 1956. Besides this, we looked at pamphlets issued on the occasion of meetings of untouchables. We met some individuals and sought out addresses. We met the relatives of women who were no longer living and collected information from them. We tried to get information about the women in the movement from all possible sources.

The purpose of doing all this was to try and form a picture of the neglected, underrated woman activist of the Ambedkar movement: her capability, the history she had made in the most adverse circumstances, the change that took place in her because of that history, the way she was shaped and influenced, her longing for education and her deep feeling for the importance of education, her ethical integrity, her courage, and her development as an individual. We wanted to bring her contribution to public view.

We have no words to express the extent of the co-operation we received from so many persons. It would be ungrateful on our part not to mention what they did. The concept of this research

comes from Chhaya Datar. She told us how and in what direction to investigate the work done by the women, and gave us whatever information she could. We also received valuable guidance from Vasant Moon in this regard.

We received some financial assistance from the organisation NORAD in New Delhi, on the recommendation of Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Director of the Research Centre for Women's Studies, S.N.D.T. University. We obtained textual material and some extremely rare photographs from Vasant Moon's Babasaheb Ambedkar Research Institute, Nagpur. The discussion with Vasant Moon and Harishchandra Pawar on these materials also proved very useful. They and other members of our families helped us not just with discussions, but also with our daily household routine. We approached Dr. Y. D. Phadke to write an introduction to the book in view of his research and general interest in the Ambedkar movement. We are grateful to him having made a valuable addition to this book in the form of an introduction that is complementary to our work, including suggestions for future research. We give hundredfold thanks to all those who directly or indirectly, and with love and affection, helped in bringing out this book.

Urmila Pawar
Meenakshi Moon

Foreword

Almost twenty-five years ago, the western countries were stirred by the wave of women's liberation, and the impact of this was felt in India after 1975. Until then no one had especially taken note of women's participation in social and political movements. So too we find that students of the struggle for liberation of dalits had ignored the question of women's participation in this movement. There is no doubt that this book by Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, which takes note of women's participation in the Ambedkar movement, should be welcomed as a first step in correcting this omission.

The time between these two historic events, Mahaad satyagraha of 1927 and the conversion to Buddhism in1956 can be said to be the period of the dalit liberation struggle carried out under Babasaheb Ambedkar leadership. The two authors have collected information by looking through archives of newspapers brought out by Ambedkar and his followers during this time, and by traveling to different places to meet the persons involved and learn about both living and dead women participants in the movement. Of the 44 deceased and living women about whom Moon and Pawar have recorded information, 22 are from Vidarbha, 11 from Mumbai, 4 from Nashik, including 3 from just one family, 2 from Pune, 2 from Delhi, and one each from Madras, Phaltan and Rajapur. If

anyone were to conclude from the fact that 50 per cent of the women activists the authors have included are from Vidarbha and 25 per cent from Mumbai, that the participation of women in the Ambedkar movement was greatest in Vidarbha and after that in Mumbai, they would be sadly mistaken. It appears that for various reasons, the writers of this book have not been able to obtain information about women activists from the Marathwada region or from districts like Ahmednagar and Solapur in western Maharashtra. Of course, they admit in their preface that "The information we have gathered is like a snowflake in a vast ocean." Even so, I feel some persons should have been mentioned. For example, Rukminibai, wife of P.N. aka Bapusaheb Rajbhoj, who was Secretary of the Scheduled Castes Federation for twelve years from its inception, and their daughter Shantabai Laxman Chavan should have been mentioned by the authors. Shantabai Chavan had taken part in the satyagraha of 1946. Her articles have also been published in the weekly *Dalitbandhu* which Bapusaheb Rajbhoj brought out. In the beginning of 1948, Rajbhoj was publicly felicitated on the occasion of his release from jail in a ceremony held in the village of Kondhwe-Kaapre next to the Khadakvasla Lake near Pune. When some opponents disrupted the assembly by throwing stones from a sling, and people began to run, Rukminibai chastised them, saying: "Why are you running like women? Though I am a woman I am still here. My small children are still here. I haven't budged and you men are running away like old women! Take my bangles and put them on." And to the women: "You at least don't move. Even if the men run away we women will carry the meeting through." After this the meeting completed its agenda even though the stone pelting went on. (see p.228 of *Bapusaheb Rajbhoj, Jeevan Va Kaarya,* published by G. B. Nirantar and associates, 1956). A conference of untouchable workers of the G.I.P. Railways was held on 12th and 13th February 1938, and the Maharashtrian Untouchable Women's Conference was held at the same venue. It would have been appropriate if the authors had at least mentioned the names of the Conference President Mainabai Shamrao Bhole, and Chairperson of the Welcome Committee

Venubai Ravikant Jadhav, and of Muktabai Sheku Salve from Sholapur and Sonubai Shankarrao Gangurde from Nandgaon. In fact, even now someone should collect the reports of different Untouchable Women's Conferences held in different places and write an account, with supportive evidence, of the participation of women in the Ambedkar movement and the views they expressed on contemporary issues.

Information is available on the participation of women in the various struggles for equality carried out under Dr. Ambedkar's leadership from time to time. The authors of this book could have sought out such evidence and made use of it. For example, in the satyagraha which went on for twelve days starting from 15th July 1946, about 1950 satyagrahis courted arrest, of whom 128 were women (see p. 214, op.cit.) Just as women of the castes deemed to be untouchable are subjected to violence even today, so did they suffer violence during the period from 1927 to 1956. When it is seen that political leaders express sympathy with the attackers in such situations, it becomes necessary to hold demonstrations of protest. In 1938, the Congress ministry in Central Provinces-Berar led by Dr.Khare decided to free a criminal named Jafar Husain, convicted in a case of rape of a thirteen-year-old girl of the Chambhar caste, on grounds of mercy since his domestic situation had been disturbed by the death of his wife. The dalit women of Nagpur, angered by this, held fierce demonstrations in front of the Legislative Assembly building, and the matter was resolved. The authors should have recorded the militant role of the women in situations like this.

Even though the authors claim to be writing about the participation of women in the Ambedkar movement, in fact they have inadvertently confined themselves to the participation of women born in the castes considered to be untouchable. Thus they appear to have totally ignored the contribution of the family members of Babasaheb's numerous non-dalit associates who also took part in the Ambedkar movement in various ways. Devraj Vishnu Naik and Gangadhar Neelkanth Sahasrabuddhe, two close associates of Ambedkar, were Brahmins. Among his supporters

from the Kayastha caste were D.V. Pradhan, B.V. Pradhan, Anantrao Chitre and Suraba Tipnis. Devrao Naik took the initiative in starting the Samaaj Samata Sangh under Ambedkar's leadership in 1927, with a programme of holding inter-caste luncheons and dinners during 1928. These meals were served in the homes of activists like Sitaram Namdeo Shivtarkar of the Samaaj Samata Sangh. Indirabai, wife of Devrao Naik, Mrs. Sahasrabuddhe, Mrs. Pradhan and others took part in organizing these inter-dining programmes (see *Brahman-Brahmanetar,* 1st January 1928). The women had to face the wrath of their relatives as a result. If we consider the social mores of the time, the courage shown by these women, family members of Babasaheb's high-caste associates, should not be ignored.

In those days it was not easy to convince women to take part in the movement. Many activists of the Ambedkar movement did not approve of their wives taking part, as we can see from the interviews with Shantabai Bhalerao, Laxmibai Kakde, Babytai Kamble, Chandrika Ramteke and others, which have been included in the second part of the book. Babasaheb Ambedkar himself, we can see, from time to time called on women to take part in the movment in greater numbers. While giving the presidential address at the general body meeting of the Independent Labour Party in Naigaon, Bombay, on 27th March 1938, he said that it was a 'shameful thing' that of the one hundred thousand untouchables in Bombay, only four thousand persons had become members of the Party. Remarking that among the women present at the meeting, there were more non-members than members, he asked : "Why do women who spend two rupees a month for their *paan* and *supari*, find it so hard to pay half a rupee each year for the membership? I am relying on the women here. If they come forward and become members of the Independent Labour Party, the men will have no choice but to follow."(*Janata*: April 2, 1938)

Among Ambedkar's associates, Balkrishna Januji Devrurkar was, it appears, one who was aware of the bad state of affairs concerning untouchable women. He said, "Because of the poverty of the untouchable community, the men of the community treat their

women like slaves. They do not give any independence to their women. Women are equated to the home; but are these households happy? Because of a lack of money they hardly have clothes on their back, they don't get any medicine if they fall ill, they are not looked after properly during childbirth, they don't get good food or fresh air; and thus the death rate among women of the backward community is very high. Because the women are illiterate they act in a shy and shrinking manner before the men. There is enough strength in the untouchable women to build a fine squadron of fighters if only the working class gets wholesome food and an education. (*Hutatma Devrurkar,* V.L. Kelsikar, 1948, p.11-12)

It was the Ambedkar movement that first showed dalit women a way out of this impasse. Dalit women first began to be present in the audience at meetings; later some of them stood up courageously to speak. Some educated women picked up their pens to express their aspirations and their sufferings in writing. It is worth noting that of the forty-four women about whose work we are given information in the second part of the book, fifteen are teachers. Of the forty-four, for Ramabai Ambedkar, Tulsabai Bansode, Meenambal Shivraj, Seetabai and Geetabai Gaikwad their participation in the movement was basically a result of their devotion to supporting their husbands in whatever work they undertook. On the contrary, women like Laxmibai Kakde, Babytai Kamble, Chandrika Ramteke, Geetabai Bhagat, Bhukshuni Chandrasheela had to face the beatings of their drunken husbands and their jealous suspicions. Shantabai Bhalerao says, "I did not get on with my husband because he wanted only a housewife." Babytai Kamble states with bitterness: "beatings, quarrels, tears and starvation were our daily diet". When Chandrika Ramteke took part in the movement, her husband would accuse her of "going there to take husbands". Some women, disregarding their husband's strictures, took part in marches, processions, satyagrahas and campaigns, even going to prison on occasion. Women like Geetabai Gaikwad and Shantabai Daani fought elections to local self-government bodies and legislative councils. A few women began to hold official posts in the party. But even today, we do not find

dalit women in a position of decision-making within the party. In parties like the Republican Party and the Dalit Panthers, which are the offspring of the Ambedkar movement, and their various factions, men still have overall control. Even today, women do not have a fair share in party activity. It would not be appropriate to dismiss this reality by saying that the same situation prevails in all non-dalit parties too. I feel that this review of women's role in the Ambedkar movement up to the present undertaken by Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon will be useful when we consider how to increase the participation of women in future in the movement inspired by Ambedkar.

Y.D. Phadke

Reply to Inappropriate Foreword

The research-based book *Aamhihi Itihaas Ghadavlaa* written by Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon has just been published. This book makes an important addition to the small number of books that have been written on Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement. The authors have dealt with a question to which nobody has paid much attention so far: no book published so far had set out the contribution that dalit women made to the Ambedkar movement. Even though some books have brief references relating to women, not even one dalit or non-dalit researcher had taken note of the work women did or the changes they brought about,. We can say more: those writers who wrote about women-related reforms or women's movements in Maharashtra have not even mentioned the work done by dalit women. Dr. Y.D. Phadke has written a book in English entitled *Women in Maharashtra*. Writing about social and educational reforms relating to women, that is, to middle-class Brahmin women, he has not even mentioned dalit women, let alone the dalit women's movement. When we read this book against this background, we realise that it makes an important addition to the history of social movements in Maharashtra, not just of the dalit movement.

The authors have divided the book into two parts. In the first we find a wealth of rare and difficult-to-access material gathered through research into various newspapers, reports and books; while interviews with women participants in the movement are collected in the second part. The combining of these two parts has brought certain limitations to the book. If the authors had presented their research material more discursively, this would have made the book more than three hundred pages long. But since the authors have sought out the women mentioned in the first part to gain first-hand knowledge about their work, and since for those who were no longer living, they have complied biographical accounts by meeting the women's relatives and associates and collecting information from newspaper reports, it is apparent that both parts of the book have been somewhat constrained.

In the first place, when little or no previous research had been done in this area, the vast amount of literature that the authors have referred to testifies to the great efforts they have taken over a period of two to two and a half years. The book's index cites the 27 or so English, Marathi and Hindi books, various census reports dating from the first Indian Census of 1891, several files from the Archives, as well as other official reports. Also, the references to newspaper reports show that the authors have gone through most of the important newspapers and periodicals during 1908 to 1958, that is, the period of the Ambedkar movement.

Those who know the circumstances in which these writers carried out their work cannot fail to be astonished when they read the information presented in this book. These authors are not professional teachers or researchers, taking leave from their schools or colleges to conduct research on a fellowship. Though both of them have earlier written and published some short stories, they have not undertaken any research work before this. They have not the standard equipment for research, and furthermore, the usual sources like the Tata Institute or the Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahaalay did not yield much material on their subject. While a lot of material on Hindu women is generally available in libraries, there is till today not a single book to be found that gives information on dalit women activists.

In these difficult circumstances, the authors, while taking care of their household duties, visited the cities of Pune, Nasik, Akola, Amaravati, Delhi and many large and small villages, to collect whatever documents they could find. They simultaneously carried out the work of research and interviews, pouring their whole strength into the work. Having collected the material, they worked day and night to put the book together.

Vasant Moon

PART I

1

Social Background

"The protagonists of *Chaturvarnya* do not seem to have considered what is to happen to women in their system. Are they also to be divided into four classes, *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Shudra?* Or are they to be assumed to take the status of their husbands. If the status of the women is to be the consequence of marriage what becomes of the underlying principle of Chaturvarnya, namely that the status of a person should be based upon the worth of that person? If they are to be classified according to their worth, is the classification to be nominal or real? If it is nominal, then it is useless and then the protagonists of *Chaturvarnya* must admit that their system does not apply to women."[1]

What then was, in fact, the position of women in the varna system? The only answer is that the position of women was, like that of the shudras, one of service to others. The upholders of the varna system held that the shudras were to serve the higher castes who were in turn to act as guardians of the shudras, so that the shudras had no need for any other source of income; and the same applied to women. On the surface it appears that there is a relation of guardianship between the shudras and women on the one hand and the upper castes on the other; but there is no provision for redressal of grievances by the 'wards' who might suffer from abuse

of this relationship by their upper caste male guardians. On the contrary, the *Dharmashastras* have laid down, and made customary, a set of inhuman and shameful rules regulating the behaviour of the 'wards' and imposing punishments for their transgressions. Thus these relations have in practice been those of master and servant; and for generations upper-caste men have enjoyed the right to suck the blood of their servants.

When we consider the question of women's autonomy, we are often told of several learned women who were well versed in debate in the Vedic age: Gargi, Maitreyi, Sulabha, Vidyadhari. In those times women had the right to study and teach the Vedas. They would speak and debate on profound and complex subjects like religion and philosophy.

The Buddhist religion had also granted this freedom to women. Many women like Mahprajapati Gautami, Aamrapaali, Sujata, Kshema, Kundalkesha, Dharmadinna, Patachara, Bhadrakanchan, Shrungaal-maataa, Utpalvarna, Nanda, Bhadraakapilaa, Krushagautami attained entry into the Sangha, achieved a status there and thus gained the opportunity for self-development and uplift.

Later Manu abolished this autonomy by writing down dharmic laws and imposing harsh constraints on women. The life of women and Shudras reached a low point. The lives of entire generations were spent in bonded labour. Right down to the time of the Peshwas, the varna system was like a dacoit who, wearing the garb of the *Dharmashastras*, waylaid the shudras and women and utterly destroyed the life of the untouchables.

When the British came to this country they brought their egalitarian Christian religion with them. They brought missions and missionaries who were dedicated to serving the people. Education brought a wave of reforms and the educated upper-caste Indian reformers turned their attention to issues within their own castes, to their own customs and traditions. There were movements taking up questions like sati, child marriage, widow remarriage, remarriage in general and the custom of shaving the heads of widows.

On the other hand, reformers like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Gopalbaba Walangkar, Maharaj Sayajirao Gaikwad, V.R. Shinde, S.J. Kamble and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar concerned themselves with the sorrows of the untouchables, their poverty and destitution. They turned their attention to the liberation of the Bahujan communities whose lives had been wrecked by the caste system and by Hindu religious traditions. We will refer to the activity for social liberation of the non-Brahmin castes taken up in this period, from Mahatma Phule to Ambedkar, as the 'pre-Ambedkar movement'.

When Dr. Ambedkar himself entered the movement for the liberation of untouchables in 1920, it had already begun to grow on educational, social, political, economic and religious lines. In this period the Ambedkar movement took root, grew and spread everywhere. In the beginning it had a base in major cities like Mumbai, Colaba, Nashik, Satara and Sholapur. Later on it spread to the whole of Vidarbha and Marathwada. The Ambedkar movement is different from other movements. In other communities we find that education paved the way for social reforms, but in the Ambedkar movement education and social awakening took place side by side.

Clearly, the Mahaar caste and its sub-castes made a major contribution to this movement. A total of fifty-three sub-castes of the Mahaars entered the struggle, changed their religion and became Buddhist. Some families from the Chambhar, Maang, Dhor and Bhangi communities also adopted Buddhism. Outside Maharashtra, large numbers from the Maangs and Chambhars adopted Buddhism.

Until about the end of Peshwa rule, there was no clear line of demarcation between untouchables from the rural areas and untouchables from the cities. Untouchables everywhere lived as outcastes, outside the village boundaries. During British rule there were reforms in civic laws and the untouchable community moved to the cities for work.

Except for the Mahaars, every other untouchable caste had an occupation of its own. The Maangs, the Chambhars and the Bhangis

had their own traditional work. The Mahaars had no such occupation. Among the Mahaars, some had been granted *kotwaali watans* (land allotments in return for village service). Some of them kept to these agreements by doing any kind of work they were given, from collecting wood for fuel to piling firewood for cremations. When there were no men to do this work, the women had to do it, no matter whether they were old, pregnant or ill.

Some Mahaars did wage labour in the fields. Only rarely did they find petty jobs like operating hand looms, rolling beedis or working with bamboo. These jobs were available only in some seasons. At other times, there was nothing to do. Getting food was a constant anxiety. Thus the Mahaars migrated as a matter of course. Among the Chambhars, Maangs etc., migration was less of a common feature. From statistics relating to the migration of untouchables from Pune, Satara, Sholapur, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Colaba and Ratnagiri districts to Bombay city, it is evident that the Mahaars migrated in greater numbers than other castes. The

Migration of Mahaars & Chambhars from Districts of Maharashtra (1921 and 1931)

District	Caste	1921 Census	1931 Census
Total Migrants	Chambhars and Mahaars	89,111	82,858
Colaba	Chambhars	2,099	2,201
	Mahaars	3,846	3,940
Ratnagiri	Chambhars	5,622	6,349
	Mahaars	13,490	17,845
Nashik	Chambhars	-	-
	Mahaars	9,342	6,349
Ahmednagar	Chambhars	2,531	1,002
	Mahaars	16,235	16,109
Pune	Chambhars	3,550	2,890
	Mahaars	10,955	7,829
Sholapur	Chambhars	1,884	1,249
	Mahaars	2,331	2,229
Satara	Chambhars	4,561	3,050

figures from the 1921 and 1931 censuses given below illustrate this clearly.

Occupational Status

In the cities, caste-wise settlements of untouchable migrants were coming up. The Mahaars, especially, took to reform quickly as they came into contact with city life. Their social, educational, and economic status began to improve.

Untouchables began to work as labourers in the mills, factories and docks. They found work mainly as wage labour in the railways, in road building and in construction, and as sanitation workers in the municipalities and in clinics and hospitals. There were also many women among them.

As cotton mills and markets for oranges sprang up in Vidarbha, people from the untouchable castes were able to earn a living in the towns doing petty jobs. Some acted as agents in trade. Beedis were being rolled in many homes of untouchables.

In towns like Nipani many untouchable workers subsisted on work in the tobacco industry. The Mahaar community had, up to 1943, the right to pick the stems of the tobacco plants and to collect leaves that had ripened prematurely and fallen of the plant. This produce, *'ghal'*, was pounded and sold in the market. Besides this, the Mahaars, and especially the Mahaar women, did the work of watering the tobacco plants, drying the leaves and getting them crushed by buffaloes, etc.[2]

Migration

Among those who left the village for the cities and towns, there was another section which, because of special circumstances, was sent to the towns: the prostitutes. Those girls from the untouchable castes, who, as the result of poverty, ignorance and superstition, were dedicated to village gods as devadasis or muralis, later turned to prostitution in the towns. Such girls were 'imported' from the villages into the cities. In the 1921 census enumeration of prostitutes from all castes, the proportion of women from the untouchable castes is high. Specifically, among the Hindu prostitutes, the proportion of Mahaar (Dhed) girls is significantly high. According

to the 1921 census, among 2,330 Hindu prostitutes there were 712 of the Mahaar or the Gujarati Dhed caste.[3]

Prostitution was traditionally considered a suitable occupation

No. of Prostitutes in Bombay City according to 1921 Census					
1.	Hindu	2,330	10.	Rajput	30
2.	Mahaar/Dhed	716	11.	Bhaaveen	28
3.	Kalawatani	208	12.	Muslim	513
4.	Vaani	10	13.	Christian	88
5.	Kolhaati	85	14.	Jewish	8
6.	Maang	64	15.	Buddhist	50
7.	Kaanchan	45	16.	Japanese	45
8.	Komaati	38	17.	Chinese	5

for untouchable women. Babasaheb in his speeches appealed to the Muralis and the Devadasis to give up prostitution.

Those who belonged to communities (castes or tribes) classified as "criminal", such as the Maang, Gosadi, Paaikhat etc., were confined to separate settlements. They had to report twice a day at the police station.

Educational Status

Vishnushastri Chiplunkar has referred to the English language as "the milk of the tigress". But it was not only the Brahmins who were aware of the importance of learning English: the Bahujans and the untouchables also realised it. The urge to gain education had come to them from Mahatma Phule. But we also see that untouchable activists took up the question of education with the help of the Christian missionaries and the British officers of the time. They began to set up primary schools and hostels at various places. In 1884 a gentleman named Jaanoji Khandare established a free boarding house, and later the movement began to spread. Even though education for touchable and untouchable women was made available at about the same time, the untouchable women could not make the same progress as the touchable women who

were economically and socially better off. Also, in the progress of education of untouchables in general, the number of educated Mahaars was greater than that of Chambhars, Maangs and others, because of the efforts made for education by the Mahaar social reformers.

The educational status of the untouchables will become clear from the following figures from the 1921 Census, showing the proportion of the educated among the Mahaar, Chambhar and Maang castes and among the women of these castes in the districts of Ahmednagar, East Khandesh, Nashik, Pune, Satara and Sholapur.

Population of Untouchables in C.P. (Berar) and Nos. of Literates among them									
Caste	Total Population			No. of Literate Persons			No. of Illiterate Persons (Marathi Region)		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Maang	78,661	38,815	39,847	306	269	37	78,355	38,456	39,810
Mahaar	11,70,737	5,79,517	5,91,220	16,201	15,646	555	11,54,536	5,63,871	5,90,665
Mehatar	13,448	7,717	5,721	256	229	27	13,192	7488	5704
Dhor (Buldhana)	2,781	1,322	1,451	3	3	0	2778	1319	1459
Chambhar	8,81,674	4,32,937	4,48,734	3,706	3320	386	8,77,938	4,29,617	4,48,351

Source: Census of India, 1921

Among the 4,36,284 Mahaars in these districts, 12,861 Mahaar men and 925 women were educated. Among 94,518 Chambhars 2,757 men and 140 women were educated. The number of Maangs was greater than that of the Chambhars, but the proportion of educated persons was smaller. Among the 1,14,765 Maangs, 1,878 men and 236 women were educated.

According to the 1921 Census, the number of Mahaars among the untouchables who know English appears to be a majority. Among 705 such persons there are 689 Mahaar men and 16 women. Among the 152 Chambhars who know English, there are 141 men and 11 women. In the Maang caste, among 128 persons who know English there are 127 men and only one woman. In the

Central Provinces (Berar), the ratio of educated untouchables to their total population was 1:3.

In the Central Provinces (Berar), there are four main untouchable castes: Mahaar, Chambhar, Maang and Bhangi. In Buldhana district the Dhor caste is present in large numbers. In the C.P.(Berar), Mahaars are in a majority among the untouchable castes. According to the 1921 census, there were 11,70,737 Mahaars, 8,81,674 Chambhars, 78,661 Maangs and 13,448 Bhangis. The number of educated among them was as follows:

Caste	Total Educated	Total knowing English	Men	Women
Maang	309	6	6	-
Mahaar	16,201	373	370	3
Mehetar	256	9	9	-
Dhor	3	-	-	-
Chambhar	3,706	152	151	1

Among the 16,201 educated Mahaars, there were 555 women. Among the Chambhars, 386 of the 3,706 educated were women. With the Maangs it was 37 women out of 309 and among the Bhangis, 27 educated women in a total of 256 with education. The numbers with knowledge of English in 1921 were as follows:

Religious Status

Although Hindu society held the untouchables to be outside religion, the untouchable community in practice worshipped gods and goddesses from the Hindu pantheon. Elders from this community gave religious instruction following the traditions of the Waarkaris, Kabir and the Mahaanubhaava saints. They worshipped the gods of these sects, made pilgrimages to Hindu sacred shrines and carried out rituals on the occasion of deaths, etc., according to Hindu customs. The untouchable community practised *pindadaan*. They celebrated the Ganesh festival, read the Puranas and other sacred texts in public prayer meetings, made pilgrimages to Pandharpur, Jejuri, Mahadev's Hill, and Yellamma

Devi. They sacrificed chickens and goats to ask for boons or to give thanks for favours received. They dedicated girls to the service of the gods, made boys play the role of Potraj. They filled baskets with flowers for the goddess and worshipped her. They believed in *bhutas, pretas,* and other ghostly spirits. In all these ways the untouchable community was a part of Hindu society.

The rituals and customs of the Hindu religion were based on the *Dharmashastra*. Sati, child marriage and the ban on (widow) remarriage were also sanctioned by the *Dharmashastras*. From the second century on, the writers of the Smrutis began to issue religious edicts prescribing child marriage. Up to the tenth century child marriage was not prevalent among the Kshatriyas and other caste groups. This can be seen from Sanskrit plays written between the third and twelfth centuries, in which the female lead roles are of girls who have attained majority.[4]

The religious edicts issued by the Smrutikaaras from the second century onwards do not explicitly favour girls being married at the age of eight or nine, rather a book like the *Brahmapurana* says that they should marry at any age.[5]

According to the census of 1891, in Maharashtra the number of widowed girls from one to four years old, little girls of such a tender age that they had not even been weaned, was 13,878.[6] However, among these widows there were girls of all castes and religions.

Since the untouchables had been kept completely away from the *Dharmashastras,* practices like child marriage, sati, prohibition of widow remarriage etc., which were followed by the upper castes on the authority of the Shastras, were probably taken up among the lower castes by way of emulation. Except for child marriage, there is no evidence of oral or written rules on these other practices among the untouchables. Among the untouchables, adult marriages took place side by side with child marriages. Men and women were remarrying even into old age. Women as well as men had the right to divorce. Widow marriages were also taking place.

According to the 1921 Census, in Bombay Province and Central Provinces-Berar, the number of widows of the Mahaar,

Maang, Chambhar, and castes among the untouchables was smaller than that of Brahmin widows. This is clear from the following figures for the numbers of widows in these castes:

Nos. and Percentages of Widows according to 1921 Census						
	C.P.- Berar			Bombay Province		
Caste	Total No. of	Women	Widows %	Total No. of Women	Widows	Widows %
Brahmin	212,458	47,596	22	61,448	33,823	55
Mahaar	591,220	88,913	15	88,312	41,601	47
Chambhar	448,737	68,930	15	18,614	47,782	42
Maang	39,846	6,172	15	23,655	9,302	39

Recognising the reality that the *Dharmashastras* were obstacles in the path of uplift and development of the shudras, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar took up a struggle against the *Dharmashastras*. In all their speeches and writings they attacked the varna system and the *Dharmashastras*. They also launched satyagrahas to press for access to water and temple entry for the untouchables. Babasaheb set up the Independent Labour Party in order to take up a definite programme of activity. He built organisations of untouchables and took up issues concerning farmers, workers, middle-class employees and small tradesmen of all castes. He worked for the protection of tenant farmers and tenants under the Khoti system, and gained reductions in the hours of work. The programme of the Independent Labour Party included demands for fair wages, paid leave, sickness benefits, old-age pensions, compensation for accidental injury, unemployment benefit, low-rent housing for workers etc., and, through Dr. Ambedkar's efforts, laws were enacted to secure these facilities.

Even as the Ambedkar movement was working on these lines, non-Dalit organisations and the Congress Party were also working for the liberation of the untouchables. But Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of the varna system and he had dreams of ending untouchability by arousing pity for the lower castes in the minds

of the upper castes. He reacted bitterly to the untouchables' assertion of their rights.

The American scholar Dr. Eleanor Zelliot narrates an anecdote in her unpublished thesis of 1951. Shri Karandikar recounts the same incident in his biography of Tilak. When the well-known Marathi writer Hari Narayan Apte was a member of the Servants of India Society, he said to Gandhiji, "The untouchables must first of all be educated." To which Gandhiji replied, "Would you incite the untouchables to rebellion by giving them education?" All the writers who have recorded this anecdote note that Gandhiji felt that the untouchables should not be provoked to rebel.

The Congress Party, the Hindu Mahasabha and other organisations made such efforts for the uplift of the untouchables as were envisaged by Gandhi and which would not go against the *Dharmashastras*. This activity was somewhat superficial. It was unlikely to bring about the overall betterment of the situation of the untouchables. It mainly involved efforts to treat untouchables as equals by assembling persons of all castes for ceremonies like *haldi-kunku*,* to give them ritual sweets made of sesame seeds and jaggery (*tilgul*), to organise their having meals together, to distribute sweets and clothes to children, to advise them about personal neatness and education.

On 14th January 1929 (on the day of the Sankraanti festival) in Wardha, the Bahishkrut Bharat Sangh under the chairmanship of B.R.Pathak carried out a tilgul ceremony in the presence of 500 persons ranging from Bhangis to Brahmins. The women were given haldi-kunku.[7]

On 14th January 1921, in Amravati, the Untouchable Women's Association under the chairmanship of Mrs. De performed a haldi-

* Translator's note : *Haldi-kunku* denotes the turmeric and vermillion powders used during ritual worship and also by Hindu married women to adorn each other's forehead as a mark of their auspicious married status. *Haldi-kunku* ceremonies are gatherings of married women. *Tilgul* is a sweet distributed during the festival of Maker Sankranti when *haldi-kunku* gatherings are held for about a month following the festival which falls on 14 January.

kunku ceremony and conducted lectures instructing the women about being neat and tidy in their person.[8]

There were also efforts to distribute clothes, eatables and scholarships to untouchable children through schools. At the Bhide Girls' School in Nagpur, Vimalabai Behere presided over the distribution of sweets and clothes to Harijan children.[9] After Gandhiji visited the Harijan Sevak Sangh in Pune, several programmes for Harijans were undertaken, including giving scholarships to Harijan children and helping them to purchase books.[10]

Besides haldi-kunku, distribution of eatables, scholarships and prizes, there were also 'inter-dining' functions. In Pune Krishnarao Pathade, secretary of the D.C. Mission and member of the Samaj Samataa Sangh, and his wife Ramabai gave vegetarian meals.[11] Anant Hari Gadre on 11th February 1936 organised inter-caste meals of *jhunkaa-bhaakar* at Musafirkhaana in Bombay.[12]

A similar inter-dining function was organised during the Ganesh festival in the Patitpaavan Temple in Ratnagiri. This was a function for women of all castes.

When Swatantrya Veer Savarkar was living in Ratnagiri, inter-caste meals were organised in this same Patitpaavan Temple. Recalling these meals, Shantabai Dharmaji Jadhav from Ratnagiri says, "I was nine or ten years old at the time. I lived at Parakhne. I enjoyed going for these inter-caste meals. Untouchables and touchables were served at the same place, sitting with some space between them. Brahmin women would come to serve the meals. When they served food to the untouchables they would tuck in their saris tightly and drop food on the leaf plates from above, taking care not to touch them."

There were also functions to reconvert untouchables who had converted to other faiths. One such occasion was quite amusing but also provokes reflection.

N.K.Vishwaas, a demonstrator from N.K. Agricultural College in Nagpur, a gentleman from the Mahaar community, tired of being treated as an untouchable, had adopted the Christian faith. On 19th October 1927, a function was organised in the Maaruti temple

at Dharampeth in Nagpur to reconvert him to Hinduism. But once he was back in the Hindu faith, his former Mahaar caste stuck to him again. Dr. Moonje (a leading member of the Hindu Mahasabha in Nagpur: some even say he was the real father of the right-wing Hindu organisation, the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh or RSS) gave a speech on this occasion. The persons of the Mahaar community who had assembled there requested Moonje to give them permanent rights to enter the temple. Moonje entered the temple and no one opposed him. But on the next day the Mahaar folk brought materials for pooja, formed a *kaakad aarti* procession and tried to enter the temple, whereupon the caste Hindus prohibited their entry and knocked over their pooja materials. In the end a quarrel flared up and the police had to be called in.[13]

Novel schemes to curb the consumption of alcohol by dalit men were taken up. Bachchubai Wagle was an untouchable woman activist working among the Harijans. She organised magic shows with the objective of engaging untouchable men's interest so that they would give up drinking.[14]

Some trading communities suffered economic loss because the caste system kept untouchables from becoming their customers. One such community was the Kaasaar, whose occupation was bangle-selling. One member of this community took it on himself to alert his caste brethren to the danger of economic loss by issuing a petition. In this petition he says, "Kaasaar brothers do not fit untouchable women with bangles, and as a result bangle-sellers of other religions take advantage of this and we lose business. The Kaasaars should think on this and be prepared to fit untouchable women with bangles, for their own profit."[15]

When we consider programmes such as these on the one hand, and Babasaheb's movement on basic issues on the other, we can conclude that the Congress and similar parties took up such activities among the untouchables only from political motives, with the objective of countering the Ambedkar movement and to prove that Gandhiji alone was the true leader of the untouchables.

While the Congress was organising programmes of this kind,

they at the same time spread propaganda against Dr. Ambedkar, calling him a lackey of the British, anti-national and anti-Hindu. Also, in several places, untouchables were being subjected to violence.

Not only were untouchables beaten if they tried to enter public temples, wells, tanks and schools, but they were attacked if they wore good clothes, used vessels of copper and brass or built good houses. Something as trivial as failure by an untouchable to express obeisance to persons of the upper castes was sufficient cause for beatings and curses.

Women also were obliged to be alert in order to face repeated atrocities. Most importantly, Babasaheb's movement engendered a kind of moral courage among the people, so that women too became capable of fighting individually for their rights.

Endnotes

1 Ambedkar, B.R.: *Annihilation of Caste*
2 Datar, Chhaya: (Mimeograph) "Organising Women Tobacco Workers in Nipaani"
3 Census of India, 1921; Vol IX, Part; Report by L.J.Sedjoi.
4 Altekar, A., *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*, p. 58.
5 Ibid. p.59.
6 Maali, M.G.: *Saavitribai Phule Samagra Waangmay*, editorial comment, p.11.
7 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 1929.
8 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, January 1929. On this occasion Mrs. Naik and Chandraabai Patwardhan made speeches.
9 *Navaa Kaal:* 3rd August, 1934.
10 *Navaa Kaal:* 25th September 1934.
Names of the girls who received scholarships:
(1) Janaabai Jadhav, Rs.5. (2) Bhimaabai Patil, Re.1 Annas 8. (3) Yashodabai Ambedkar, Rs.5 Annas 2. (4) Tarabai Kamble, Rs.2 Annas 6. (5) Bansi Khemachchi (Hingne), Rs. 4 monthly. (6) Saayanna Jadhav (Seva Sadan), Rs. 4 monthly. (7) Damayanti Shinde (Seva Sadan), Rs. 4 monthly. (8) Bakula Bhosle (Seva Sadan), Rs. 4 monthly. (9) Shantabai Waghmare (Seva Sadan), Rs. 4 monthly. (10) Tarabai Kamble (Seva Sadan), Rs. 4 monthly.
11 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 12th April 1921.
12 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 4th November 1927.
13 *Nirbhid:* 20th October, 1935.
14 *Nirbhid:* 16th February 1936. On this occasion Sakhubai Veerkar, Anusayabai Ram Bhatkhande, Smt. Sakhubai Salvi, Mathurabai Kamble, Maalatibai Godbole made speeches.
15 *Nirbhid:* 10th June, 1936.

2

Historical Background

In 1898 the flag of the Peshwas was lowered from the Shaniwarwada and the British flag was raised in its place. Once the British were firmly established in power, the reactionary nature of the ruling Brahminical culture became apparent to the people, with its belief in the after world, in purifying rituals, in the Vedas, the Shastras and the eighteen Puranas, its preoccupation with fasting, chanting and ritualistic traditions and the tight hold of the Chaturvarnya system.

Under the Peshwas the practice of untouchability was carried to an extreme. Reacting to the oppressive traditions of the Hindu religion, untouchables began to convert to other faiths like Islam and Christianity. But the orthodox Hindus did not feel any concern at this trend of conversions from the Hindu fold. Rather, some of them held in private to the misguided notion that if untouchables converted to other faiths, this would be a way of cleansing the Hindu faith by ridding it completely of untouchability.

The people of this region had forgotten the extraordinary achievements of the Mahaars who are counted among the untouchables. The Mahaars in the service of Shivaji Maharaj had won forts for him through their own valour. In the reign of Rajaram Maharaj the Mahaar Naagnaak had been entrusted with the task of penetrating the Vairatgad fort, which was held by the Mughals.

With the help of a handful of Mahaar soldiers he caused the enormous enemy army to flee from the fort and made it a part of the Maratha empire.[1]

In the time of the Peshwas, the Mahaar Sardar Shidnaak from Kalambi village near Tasgaon in Satara district showed incomparable courage in the battle of Kharda and rescued the Brahmin Sardar Parashurambhau Patwardhan who had been captured by the Pathaans. For this, Sardar Hiroji Patankar himself saluted him by declaring, "He whose sword endures is a hero."

When the British attacked Raigad fort, Rainaak Mahaar who was chief of the fort endured a15-day siege and defended the fort, defeating the British forces. He lost his life in that battle.

Thus we see that the valour of the people who had an inborn fighting spirit that would be fitting in a Kshatriya, was being ignored because the stigma of untouchability cast a shadow on that valour. When the British came to this country, they recognised this talent in the untouchables, employed them in the army and thus gave the Mahaars a chance to prove their courage. The commemorative pillar erected in Koregaon testifies to their valour.

The John Company of the British army had a large number of Mahaar soldiers. After the battle of Khadki, Captain Staunton set out from Khadki with his company of 800 infantry soldiers to meet Colonel Burr near Pune, and halted at Koregaon. There were some Arabs among the infantrymen, but most of the others were Mahaars. The Arabs handled the cannon. A Peshwa army of 25,000 under Bajirao the Second confronted Staunton's force at Koregaon. The Mahaar soldiers held the 25,000- strong Peshwa army at bay for one day and one night and routed the Peshwa force. It was to commemorate this victory that the pillar at Koregaon was erected, and the names of the valiant Mahaar soldiers engraved on it.

At Kamathi in Nagpur the Madras platoon of the British had a large number of Pariahs (an untouchable caste from Madras). When Appasaheb Bhosle fought the British in 1817, the Pariahs gave excellent support to the British. This made it possible for the British to defeat Bhosle.

The names of the Mahaar soldiers fighting under the leadership of Colonel Wadbee who died gloriously in the Afghan War are carved on a stone on Wadbee Road near Hutatma Chowk in Bombay. Thus the innate courage and valour in battle of the Mahaars found scope to express itself.

Following the resolutions made by the British in 1813 with the purpose of consolidating their rule, the East India Company from 1820 set up educational institutions all over the country to educate the people. The missionaries started the first school for girls in Ahmednagar in March 1824. By 1826 nine girls' schools had been established in different parts of the country. In all 206 girls were studying in these schools. Later on the number of schools rose to ten and 304 girls were receiving education there. These girls were taught sewing and knitting among other things. In 1830 when an examination was held in the American Temple, 230 girls had acquired the capacity to read and understand the Christian gospel and other books.[2]

Hindus were reluctant to send their children to missionary schools for fear that they would commit religious transgression. The education of women and girls was most vehemently opposed. It was with an awareness of this situation that Mahatma Jyotiba Phule started the first girls' school in Pune in 1848. In Surat Reverend Dhanjimani began a school for untouchable Dheds in 1852. On the very first day 24 students turned up. Later, the school was split up into three separate schools with 130 boys and 12 girls.[3] Boys and girls sat in the same classrooms in these schools, and studied well under this arrangement.

Even before this, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule had set up the first school for Mahaars and Maangs in 1851 in Pune, in what is now known as Mahatma Phule Peth. The missionaries had also started similar schools at around the same time. Phule's school was co-educational, and the boys and girls studied well together.

A fourteen-year-old Maang girl called Mukta who had been studying in this school for three years wrote an essay in which she drew a heartrending picture of the situation of the Mahaars and Maangs. The essay gives evidence of her level of knowledge and

education.* She says: "You drove us out, poor Mahaars and Maangs, poisoned us and buried us in the foundations of your huge buildings. In Bajirao's reign were we not treated worse than donkeys? If you beat a lame donkey, you may be sure his owner will tell you off; but was there anyone who would say that one should not beat a Maang or a Mahaar? In those days, if a Maang or a Mahaar even passed in front of the gymnasium, they would play on the Gultekdi Maidan using his head as a ball and his sword as a bat. So the right to gain knowledge was unthinkable. If by any chance someone learnt to read and Bajirao heard of it, he would say, 'A Mahaar-Maang and he reads? So should the Brahmins entrust their offices to him and go around with razors under their arms shaving widows?' Saying this they would punish him....

".... Nobody employs us as servants. So where will we get money from? When our women bear children, there is no roof over their heads. .... If they fall sick during their confinement, where is the money for medicine or doctors?....

"If the children of Brahmins and upper castes throw stones at the children of Maangs and Mahaars, and they bleed, they do not complain to the police. They say, we will have to turn to the Brahmins for their stale food....

"If someone from among the Mahaars and Maangs covers himself with a fine blanket, it is said that he must have stolen it. Only the Brahmins should use such blankets. If the Mahaars and the Maangs use them the dharma will be corrupted. So they are tied up and beaten. O Maang and Mahaar people, now study hard so that you will not fall prey to wrong ideas. The ill-treatment you have to suffer day and night will end."[4]

From this essay we can see how extreme Brahmin domination had become at the time, and also how the thoughts of Jyotiba had made an impression on his students.

These events are very important from the point of view of the education of untouchable children. Major Candy honoured

* Translator's note : There is now some dispute whether this essay was really written by the girl pupil, Mukta.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule for having started a school for untouchables with the award of a shawl by the State Board for Education.[5] Not only did Phule receive awards for his work, but the government also extended economic aid to him. The Revenue Commissioner for the south, Mr. Reeves, promised to give Rs. 15/- each month for this school for untouchables.[6]

Due to the restrictive nature of the Chaturvarnya system, all other communities, with the exception of Brahmins, were deprived of education. When the British set up schools, the Brahmins were at first unwilling to attend them.

In 1818 the Brahmin Peshwa Balasaheb Natu, whose hands raised the Union Jack over the Shaniwarwada, in defeat advised the Brahmins to take up English education, saying that there was no alternative. Being truly aware of the vital importance of education, the Brahmins later on became more accepting of education under the British. Moreover, since the Brahmins had an excellent knowledge of Marathi and Sanskrit, they were appointed as salaried teachers to teach these subjects to the European scholars and missionaries.

As education spread among the Hindu upper castes, the educated youth began to look at the Indian social order with new eyes. This educated class became newly aware of the downtrodden masses oppressed by the harsh traditions of the Hindu faith and the Chaturvarnya system, of women confined within the four walls of the home, and the injustice and violence that they suffered. At the same time, some educated people, troubled by these harsh traditions, and aware of the assault on the Hindu religion from the preaching of the missionaries, began to make efforts to soften the harshness of tradition.

Social reformers like Lokahitavadi, Agarkar, Vishnubuwa Brahmachari and Ranade tried to bring reforms in the undesirable customs of Hinduism, its inappropriate traditions and prejudices. It was through such efforts that the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, the Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra and the Arya Samaj in Punjab were formed.

With the exception of Mahatma Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj,

associations of this type did not appear to take up the question of abolition of untouchability with any seriousness. All of them were more concerned with reform of tradition within upper-caste society.

Following Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, the founder of the Satyashodhak Samaj, other caste Hindu leaders such as Justice Ranade, Shahu Maharaj Chhatrapati of Kolhapur, Raja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda, Mahatma Gandhi, freedom fighter Savarkar, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil, Mate and Narayanrao Chandavarkar made efforts for the liberation of the untouchables. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was acutely aware of the extent of Brahmin domination. He abolished poojas performed by Brahmins, the practice of serving meals to Brahmins and of paying them *dakshina,* the traditional donation given in recognition of ritual services, and opened up the path to economic, social and educational development of the Bahujans and the untouchables.

Vitthal Ramji Shinde had been trying from 1907 to get a resolution for the abolition of untouchability passed by the Congress. In the end he had to take the help of a woman, in fact a foreigner. Shinde requested Dr. Annie Besant to ensure that a resolution concerned with untouchability would be passed by the Congress, since she carried some weight in the Congress party. Finally, in 1917, through her efforts, the Congress adopted a resolution to the effect that "The enormous oppression that has been inflicted on the untouchable community should come to an end immediately." The resolution was seconded by S.R. Banerjee and supported by Manjiri Ramayya of Calicut.[7]

Changes were gradually taking place in the standard of living and manner of dress among those members of the untouchable community who were employed in the British army. As their standard of living improved, so did their thinking change. A new social commitment and an awareness of the plight of their community spread among them.

Gopalbaba Valangkar was one of the first reformers of Mahatma Phule's time. He expressed his views in newspapers like *Gyanodaya, Deenamitra, Deenabandhu,* wrote in the *Sudharak* magazine, and

also published a book entitled *Abolition of (the custom of) Purity and Pollution.* In 1886, he founded an association called the Society for the Removal of Faults among the non-Aryas, with the aim of starting a movement for the abolition of untouchability. This was the first social organisation in the untouchable community.

After Valangkar, Shivram Jaanaba Kamble began his work of social awakening in Pune, from about 1904. He wrote in *Deenabandhu* at first, and on 1st July 1908 he started a new magazine, *Somavanshi Mitra.* In this journal he wrote a number of articles with a view to bringing about social, religious and economic progress among the untouchables. He had a liberal view regarding women's issues, and rehabilitated some prostitutes from his own community.

Later an association called the Rohidas Dnyanodaya Samaj was established among the Chambhars of Mumbai, and similar independent movements were launched among the Maangs. It was around this time that Vithoba Ramji Moonpande, Kisan Phagoji Bansode and Kalicharan Nandagavali began a vigorous movement for the liberation of untouchables in Nagpur, in the Vidarbha region of eastern Maharashtra. Their wives and other women of their community were also involved in their activities.

The untouchable community in eastern Maharashtra was economically relatively better off than in western Maharashtra. By the first decade of the twentieth century, several social activists were participating wholeheartedly in the movement against untouchability, making generous contributions to the funds. Thus any reform activity easily obtained financial support and the work of social reform proceeded at a good pace.

In 1904, Vithoba Moonpande at his own expense built a *ghaat* for untouchables to bathe at the Ambala Lake in Ramtek near Rampur. He made efforts to secure education and other facilities for the untouchables, and also tried to persuade the Mahaar people to give up eating beef and the meat of carcasses. He founded an association of Mahaars called the Antyaja Samaj Committee in 1906 during the pilgrimage in the month of Kartiki. Vithoba Raoji Moonpande was the president of the association, which had sixty-

four Mahaar members. In those days it was unthinkable for untouchable women to participate in any social organising activity, but this association had one woman member on its executive committee in 1913. She was Tulsabai Bansode, wife of Kisan Phagoji. The objectives of this Mahaar organisation were to bring about social and educational progress. The committee put special emphasis on educating girls, and, as a result, the number of girls going to school increased. Kisan Phagoji followed the ideal of Mahatma Phule by teaching Tulsabai to read and write. Later Tulsabai carried on the work of running the printing press that Bansode had set up. This was really an unprecedented event. It was a manifestation of the principle that untouchable women should achieve the right to work side by side with men in every sphere.

Endnotes

1 *Bahishkrut Bharat,* May, 20th, 1927: There were Mahaar soldiers in the reign of Hyder Ali Tipu Sultan too. When the king conquered a new territory or fort, he would entrust the task of guarding it to the Mahaar forces.
2 *Dnyanodaya,* 15th June, 1854.
3 *Dnyanodaya,* 15th July, 1854.
4 Joshi, N.V., "A Description of Pune City: School for the Ati-Shudras", Supplementary issue no.2. (The authenticity of the essay by Muktabai has been questioned by later scholars. ---translator)
5 *Dnyanodaya,* December, 1853.
6 *Dnyanodaya,* 1st March, 1854.
7 Khairmode, C.B.: *Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar,* Vol. 5, p. 299.

3

Laying Down The Foundation for Education

It was only after British rule was established in this country that the doors opened for the education of society as a whole and social reforms began to unfold. Members of the untouchable community, which had been boycotted by society and hence neglected, were given jobs in the British army.[1] Untouchables, especially Mahaars, were working not only as performers in bands, stretcher-bearers, gardeners, sanitation workers, but also in the kitchens as cooks and butlers. It was thus not surprising that they were more influenced by this treatment by the English than by the Brahmin class. In particular, the community had become more aware about education. Mahatma Phule had in 1852 laid the foundation for the education of untouchables. Since the children of untouchables recruited into the army enjoyed special educational facilities, girls as well as boys had begun to go to school.

Babasaheb Ambedkar's father was a Subhedar in the army. His neighbour, Mr. Jadhav (Poipkar), from the Konkan, was a Jamaadaar in the army. Mr. Poipkar's daughter Gangu was studying in the 4th class in 1913. She was the first and only girl from the untouchable community to go to school at the time.

In the princely state of Baroda, there were ten thousand boys and girls in school by 1909, and a hostel had been built for them.[2] As no Hindu teachers could be found to teach them, Muslim and Christian teachers were appointed. A meeting of untouchable students was held at Motibaug Maidan in Baroda, under the chairmanship of the Maharaja, Sayajirao Gaikwad. Present at the meeting were 550 boys and girls of the Mahaar, Dhed and other castes. The girls attended the meeting wearing chintz saris distributed by the Maharaja.[3]

In 1911, in Gondiya in the east of the Vidarbha region, Kallicharan Nandgawali spent Rs. 3000 to establish the first *"putri-shaala"* or school for daughters.[4] Nandgawali was honoured for this deed. Kisan Phagoji Bansode also started a girls' school at about this time.

According to the 1911 census, the proportion of the educated among the untouchables was nine per thousand. Around 1920, there were 22 schools run by missionary institutions and 42 other schools, including 14 private schools. In the remaining 28 (state) schools, there were 34 girls and 1235 boys among the untouchables. In the state-run schools there were 2518 girls in all in primary school, and 39 untouchable girls in middle school.[5]

The Bombay branch of the Bahishkrut Bharat Samaj was established in January 1919. This association started a free school for untouchables from April 1923. According to the records, there were 15 girls among the 41 untouchable students attending this school in March 1925.[6]

The Nutan Somavanshiya Hitachintak Samaj in 1922 started a day school, a night school, a library and a debating society for untouchable children. The day school had 50 boys and ten girls.[7] At Bhamburde village near Pune, there were four schools for untouchables in the Maangwaada. In one night school there were about thirty students, among them were two girls.[8]

In an article entitled "The Need for Girls' Schools in Villages", Krishna Nayaku Sutar has expressed his views as follows: "If schools for girls are not started in the villages, untouchable women will remain uneducated, and because of a lack of practical knowledge,

they will be deprived of domestic happiness. Girls' schools should be started so that the ignorant womenfolk may gain practical knowledge and be made fit for motherhood."

The same Krishna Nayaku Sutar wrote a biography of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in 1938, probably the first to be written.[9]

In the Seva Sadan Institute in Nagpur, only three untouchable girls were enrolled in 1930. In 1932, the Satara, School Board started a school for untouchable girls in the village of Nerle in Walve tehsil (in western Maharashtra).[10]

To promote the education of untouchable girls, some associations of untouchables instituted scholarships and provided for free schooling.[11] The Somawanshi Mandal in a ceremony awarded a scholarship of Rs.10 to a girl called Mirabai Jadhav from a girls' school in Thane. About 3000 untouchable women attended the ceremony. Similarly, in Satara Shri P.N. Rajbhoj declared that untouchable girls should be given scholarships and that girls studying in the board schools should get the necessary facilities.[12]

In the conference of untouchables held at Borgaon village in Wardha district it was resolved that improvements be made in educational facilities for women and in matters related to marriage.[13] A similar resolution relating to girls' education was passed in 1934 in a meeting presided over by Subhadrabai Ramteke.[14]

In some schools for untouchables, the education of girls was promoted by starting reading rooms, debating clubs and night classes for boys and girls.[15] In the night schools the pupils were given encouragement in the form of prizes. In the night school run by the Untouchability Mandal in Pune, where 80 girls were enrolled, a prize distribution function was held on 31st March 1925 at which Mrs. Borade, an untouchable woman made an appropriate speech.[16] Mrs. Savitribai Borade also spoke on 'The Duties of Men in Respect of Women's Education Today'.[17] At Walpakhadi the Municipal Corporation was requested to start a school for backward-class untouchable girls under the Gujarati Depressed Class association.[18]

A conference of the Outcastes of India (Bharatiya Bahishkrut) was held in Nagpur in 1920, presided over by Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur. Untouchable women were present at this conference. A resolution was passed concerning free and compulsory schooling. Mrs. Tulsabai Bansode and Rukminibai spoke for the resolution, in plain language but with courage, stating that there was a need to make education compulsory for girls.[19]

Thus the education of women was promoted in many ways, by passing resolutions, awarding prizes, making speeches, writing articles and instituting scholarships.

In schools for caste Hindus there was no arrangement for seating untouchable students. These children would have to sit outside the classroom or in the veranda, and take in whatever they could hear from a distance. The teachers too kept their distance from these pupils for fear of pollution. As a result, the proportion of untouchable children, especially girls in these schools was very small. This was noted by some untouchable women social activists in Vidarbha, who strongly felt the need for girls' schooling. Thus Jaibai started a school for untouchable girls in Nagpur in 1924.[20] This was the first instance of an untouchable woman starting a school of this kind.

In the Buldhana Untouchable Women's Conference held at Malkapur in Vidarbha a resolution was unanimously passed to the effect that untouchable boys and girls should be provided school facilities on the lines recommended in the government report and that special provisions be made for girl pupils in the Female Normal School.[21]

This awareness of the issue of education for girls was, in fact, confined to a small number within the untouchable community. But even this was too much for the upper castes. We find that some orthodox persons among the upper castes tried to hinder the progress of education among untouchable girls. In the high school at Amravati an untouchable girl was prevented from taking admission. The Mahaar Berar Parishad deplored this and petitioned the government to make fair provisions for enrolling untouchable children in schools.[22]

Not only were untouchable students deprived of education because of the practice of untouchability, but untouchable teachers found it hard to get jobs. In the Nagar Parishad Girls' School in Dharwad, untouchable girls were not admitted because of caste discrimination. Then a Mahaar named Balwanrao Varale was elected member of the Dharwad Nagar Parishad school board in 1931. Varale was a dedicated social worker and a loyal follower of Ambedkar. He brought a girl of the Maang community named Geetabai Shedge to Dharwad from Pune and appointed her as teacher in the school.[23] Although he had to confront other members of the board and the board chairman on this issue, he succeeded in the end in making her appointment permanent. Geetabai Shedge (Pawar) has recounted this incident in an interview.

Some untouchable social activists gave special thought to the problems of backward class, poor, orphaned but promising girl students and built hostels for them.

Anjanibai Deshbhratar established the first such hostel in Nagpur around 1935. She even inserted an advertisement in the *Janata* newspaper of 30th June, 1936, appealing to all untouchable girls of the Mahaar, Maang, Bhangi, Chambhar castes studying in the English or Marathi medium to avail of accommodation in this hostel.

Within Maharashtra, Dadasaheb Gaikwad established another such hostel in Nashik in 1948. His wife Geetabai Gaikwad was the manager of this hostel, which accommodated 20 girls in its first year and 31 girls in 1949. Geetabai issued a pamphlet announcing that girls of the backward classes and all untouchable castes would be admitted to the hostel.[24]

A convention of untouchable girl students of Central Provinces (Berar) was held in June 1936. Another convention was organised at the New Cotton Market, Nagpur, on 24th and 25th May, 1936, with the object of bringing together all untouchable girls of Central Provinces (Berar). Yashodabai Dahat presided and welcomed the girls. There was an exhibition of handicrafts, a debating competition and other contests.[25]

To raise funds for schools and hostels for untouchables, plays and other functions were organised, and untouchable women activists were often the organisers.

On 31st January 1951, a performance of the play *Taaklele Por* (The Abandoned Child) was organised by the Snehakala Natya Mandir, Pune, to raise funds for R.R.Bhole's Backward Class Boarding Ahilyashram in Pune, as announced by the social worker Kasutai Kedari in the *Janata* newspaper of 6th June 1951.

The untouchable community was also becoming aware of the need for untouchable girls to join various associations, to develop their talents and their personalities. In C.P. (Berar), elections to various posts in the Untouchable Students' Association were held every year. Two members' posts and one out of two joint secretaryships were reserved for girls.[26]

As the untouchable community was becoming awakened on the question of education, we find that some girls from this community attained success in extremely difficult conditions.

Susheela Pawar of Siddharth College, Mumbai, was the first untouchable woman to earn a B.A. degree.

Endnotes

1 Khairmode, op.cit., Vol.I, p.66.
2 *Somawanshi Mitra,* 1st October 1909.
3 Ibid., 1st March 1910.
4 Pamphlet on the resolution passed in the Mahaar Parishad, 14th April, 1913.
5 Moon, V., "Warhaadatil Ambedkarpoorva Dalit Chalval" p.32.
6 *Dnyanaprakash,* 5 February 1926.
7 Ibid., 14 April 1923.
8 Ibid., 27 February 1925.
9 Ibid., 13 January 1931.
10 Ibid., 17 May 1924, Public Meeting of the Somawanshi Mandal, 4 November 1922.
11 Ibid., 17 May 1932 and 23 February 1932.
12 Kosare, p.251.
13 *Janata,* May 1934.
14 *Dnyanaprakash,* 10 April 1924.
15 *Kesari,* March 1925.
16 *Dnyanaprakash,* 8 Feb. 1917.
17 Kosare, p. 110.
18 *Peoples' Herald,* 30 Jun.1945.
19 Kosare, p. 260.

20 *Dyanprakash,* 5 Apr. 1917, (C.P.) Varhad Meeting held On 18th, 19th & 20th Mar. 1917.
21 Varale P. 38, Geetabai Pawar explained in her interview.
22 *Dnyanaprakash,* 24 Jan. 1949.
23 Kosare, P. 292, Miss. Chandrabhagabai, Sharadabai Dhawale, Sarala Borakar, Chandravati Mandale, Sakhubai Meshram made speeches in this gathering, vote of thanks given by Anjanibai Deshabratar.
24 *Arun,* 25 Aug. 1947.
25 *Janata,* 12 Jun. 1948. Organising committee of this meeting: Chairperson: Shri. S.V. Dahat. (Mecosabag Normal School) Chairperson, welcome committee: Treasurer: Mrs. Yashodabai Ramteke. (Sevasadan). General secretary : Mrs. Sharadabai Dhawale. (Sevasadan). Assistant general secretary: Janabai Tagade. (Sevasadan), Miss Geetabai Patil (St. Ursula Girls' High School). Games Secretary : Miss.Rajakumari Bele. Exhibition Secretary : Miss. Annapurnabai M o o n . (Kirti Patil, Bhide Girls' High School.) Members : Mrs. Gangubai Sonone, Mrs. Vimal Somkunwar, Mrs Parvatibai Sontakke, Sugandha shende and several other women.

4

From Slumber to Awareness

Through the efforts of social reformers like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Gopalbaba Valangkar, V.R. Shinde, Shivram Jaanba Kamble, Shaahu Maharaj, Moonpande, Kisan Phagoji Bansode and Kallicharan Nandagavali, women began to attend public meetings and conventions together with men. They were becoming aware of the events that were taking place around them.

Since social, political and educational matters were discussed in these gatherings, the women who were present were exposed to the current political debates. Dalit men made it a point to take the women of their households to these meetings, so that they gradually became conscious of the contemporary reality.

We see that women sang songs of welcome at the commencement of the All-India Bahishkrut Parishad of 1920. Women and young girls were asked to sing welcome songs at many meetings and gatherings of the untouchables.[1] This helped the women to overcome their fear of speaking in public. They sang songs of social uplift. Later, when the celebration of Ambedkar's birth anniversary became a universal practice, the anniversary functions usually began with tuneful singing by the girls.

It was about this time, around 1920 that Babasaheb began his social activity among the untouchables. The untouchable community did not take much notice of him at first. In Ambedkar's first meeting at Kamathipura Galli No. 13, there were just three or four activists and a few chairs. There was no stage or platform. The men stood around in the doorways of nearby houses smoking beedis. In the end people had to be called individually from their homes. Ambedkar recalls this in his speech in 1942.

As untouchable activists began to travel all over Maharashtra, they generated a new feeling of enthusiasm. Huge meetings were being held in villages, and women were attending them in large numbers together with the men. Scenes of untouchable women sitting in contact with caste Hindu women, thigh-to-thigh, so to speak, could be seen for the first time, even if only rarely.[2]

In fact dalit women began to express their views clearly on social and political matters quite early on. When the British government banned picketing by the Congress, it was a Mahaar widow who placed the resolution condemning the government's action before a meeting of Maangs and Mahaars.[3] At the National Social Conference held in Nagpur on 30th December, 1933, a Mahaar woman, Mrs. Venutai Bhatkar, displayed her self-esteem and social consciousness by speaking with great determination on the subject of untouchability and the abolition of untouchability in the presence of Bipin Krishna Bose and other leaders. She said, "I am after all an ignorant woman. But I certainly feel that unless the untouchables are made touchable we will not gain self-rule. When a girl goes to school they ask her, 'Who are you?' When she answers, 'A Mahaar', the truth is that they say, 'oh what a mockery.' In Pune and Mumbai the pollution rules are not so strictly observed, but in Nagpur the Mahaars have a lot to face. I was even told that the Brahmins here would beat me. The situation of the Mahaars* is very bad. The village patil is their husband. (laughter) In this situation how are the Mahaar women to carry on? I am a nurse, I don't get work. I was advised to become a Christian. Then I would have got a job. But I will not leave my caste. (Applause) To steal a name, to steal a caste, this I will never do. I will stay in my caste and strive to improve my caste." Mrs. Bhatkar attended

* Translator's note : Mahaar women

various meetings and assemblies and made many speeches.

The annual convention of the C.P. (Berar) Mahaar Parishad was held at Mohaya on 23rd and 24th February 1924. On that occasion a Brahmin speaker made the remark, "Mahaars should not eat meat chopped by a butcher, but they may eat the meat of carcasses." Venutai Bhatkar and Rangubai Shambharkar took him severely to task for this. In the women's meeting an important resolution was passed, that "the untouchables should not rely on caste Hindus for reforms, but we must strive for our own liberation." There were also resolutions that the government should take action against untouchability and take steps for the education of the untouchables, etc.

Movements, in general, develop in a many-sided fashion. Just as there are internal trends within movements, external events and developments also play their role. Those who supported inequality used the relations of conflict within the untouchable community, between Mahaars and Maangs, as a trump card. In many villages the women of these two castes did not even draw water at the same wells. An attempt to bring these women together was made at a meeting at the initiative of the Ambedkarite leader Shivtarkar, a Chambhar.[6]

Some women worked for social reforms by spreading the word about education, cleanliness etc., among untouchable communities. Thus, for example, Shrimati Dinabai Bhosle, a Maang woman student of Seva Sadan, Pune, made a speech in the Maang colony in Kasba Peth on 20th October 1925. She called on Maang girl students to make use of the Seva Sadan Institute, and also spoke about the importance of good health. She advised against eating the meat of dead animals.[7]

The Ambedkar movement gradually spread its influence over the next few decades, and women from other untouchable castes besides the Mahaars also entered public life and social activism. On 29th May 1956, an all-Maharashtra conference of Chambhars and Dhors was held in Pune. Two women from the Seva Sadan, Savitribai Borade and Gunabai Waghmare, made speeches.

Savitribai Borade said, "Girls need schooling more than boys. We must educate our women to prevent disaster for the next generation. The education of children is entirely dependent on the mother. Education is essential for cleanliness, good health and good nurturing." After this Gunabai Waghmare said, "Women must study. When a woman is educated, the children are well brought-up from the start. It is essential for the women to be educated so that their children may receive proper guidance, and to make the next generation intelligent and well educated."[8]

As women acquire a sense of self-respect, they gain the capability to fight individually for their rights. An untouchable woman named Parvatibai Shripat, who was the wife of a policeman, once she became aware that she had the right to draw water at the public well, conducted an individual satyagraha and attained the right to draw water there. Some women became so courageous that they became capable of taking collective action to confront attacking hoodlums. When hoodlums attacked a person named Nivrutti M. Kadam in the Patryachi Chawl at Bhokarwadi in Pune on 23rd September 1951 at 5 a.m. no men were present to resist. But three women named Savitribai, Sarubai and Krushnabai came forward, wrested the sticks and other weapons from the hands of the attackers and chased them off.[10]

We can also see that the women often displayed great dedication to Ambedkar's ideology through their actions. A 50-year-old woman named Sonabai hailed Ambedkar by shouting 'Jaibheem'. Hindu hoodlums punished her for this by beating her mercilessly and parading her on a donkey, but she was not deterred.[11]

We usually refer to a living person's date of birth as his (or her) birthday. But in Babasaheb Ambedkar's case his birthday was referred to as his Jayanti or anniversary, and it became an occasion for festivity and celebrations for untouchables through a whole month. This practice became prevalent during Ambedkar's lifetime (from about 1934 onwards) and continues up to the present day. Women took part in these celebrations from the beginning. In the newspaper *Patitpavan*, Patitpavan Das uses the word 'birthday' in this context.[12]

Ambedkar Jayanti was celebrated throughout Maharashtra and elsewhere too. Women held their own separate meetings on these occasions. The women would organise parades with Ambedkar's photograph placed in a chariot,[13] distribute sweets to children, and hold haldi kunku programmes,[14] competitions etc. Several women would deliver speeches on Babasaheb Ambedkar's life and on social and political issues. On 16th September 1948, Anjanibai Deshbhratar made a speech in the Ambedkar Jayanti festival in Nagpur. In the Nashik region, several women spoke during the Jayanti celebrations.[15] Women also spoke at Nashik Road and Thane,[16] and Kasara.[17] In a public discussion on the subject of The Duty of Women in Today's Situation held at Chandgaon, district Nashik, Radhabai Jadhav, Savitribai Jadhav, Changunabai Jadhav, Raibai Jadhav, Rukminibai Jadhav and a girl called Gajara Gangurde took part.[18] In the Wadala Kacharpatti in Mumbai, Ambedkar Jayanti was celebrated by the Students' Welfare Association of the Maatang community with Shri D.C. Waydande as chairman.[19] Shrimati Saibai Kom spoke on this occasion. A special item was the performance by schoolgirls Kalubai, Sarubai, Shantabai, Gayabai and Shevantabai who presented satirical numbers and verses making fun of people's dirty living habits, etc. In the Jayanti festival held in the Imamwada Colony in Nagpur on 26th April 1936, the main women activists of the time, Radhabai Kamble, Sakhubai Meshram, Anjanibai Deshbhratar, Satyabhama Patil and Dalambibai Tatode made speeches.

Untouchable women also asserted their views through speeches made at various meetings and conferences. Three hundred women were present at the Regional Untouchable Conference of C.P. (Berar) and Khandesh. The women passed resolutions regarding appropriate representation of untouchables at the Round Table Conference and opposing the stand taken by Gandhi.[20] This conference was held in 1936, immediately after the first Round Table Conference was concluded. Resolutions deploring violence committed against Dalits were also often passed during such conferences.[21]

On 23rd June, 1938, a Dalit Association was formed at de Lisle Road, Mumbai, with the following principles and programme being adopted:

1. The success of the self-reliance movement depends largely on the women of the community; they should be made aware of this and urged to be active.
2. Elderly women, with their old-fashioned thinking, often oppose and hinder the younger women in their households from taking part in social work. This hindrance can be eliminated if the older women are introduced to new ideas.
3. Women should be continually urged to subscribe to the Independent Labour Party.
4. The association should frequently organise programmes of public speeches so that illiterate women may overcome their shyness.
5. The association should provide teaching and materials so that the women of the community may gain education and knowledge of embroidery.
6. With a view to protect the health of the community, women should be taught about cleanliness and keeping a neat appearance.
7. Financial help should be arranged for poor and promising girl students.[22]

The anniversary of the Mahaad satyagraha has been celebrated as Independence Day by the Dalits for some years now. In a programme organised by the Dr. Ambedkar Mandal, Love Lane, Mumbai, on 19th March 1940, Miss Sitabai Vairat and Shantabai Ughade first made speeches and then gave thanks to Ambedkar for having freed the untouchables from slavery.[23]

In Nagpur, in the Ambedkar Jayanti programme of 1940, speeches were made by Mrs. Nagubai Ganveer and Shevantabai Gajbiye (secretary) of the women's wing of the Samata Sainik Dal (Soldiers for Equality), which had been formed within the Independent Labour Party as early as 1938.

When the Ramabai Bhagini Mandal of Amalner East celebrated Ambedkar Jayanti, Kashibai Birhade was chairperson. Similarly,

Janabai Waghmare was in the chair at Amaravati (C.P.) and Parubai Sonavane at Barshi.[24]

In April 1946 a curfew had been imposed in Nagpur city because of rioting between caste Hindus and untouchables. But the women's wing of the Samata Sainik Dal held the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations with enthusiasm in defiance of police orders. About 500 women took part. The programme was led by Miss Damayantibai Bhimte and Miss Anjanabi Kanphade and went on for three hours. Damayantibai made a fiery speech.[25]

Just as they say that an army marches on its stomach, so financial backing is essential for any movement. When Babasaheb entered the arena of social reform, he had scholarship, a plan of action, an ideology; he also had people's support, but he had no funds. When the Mahaad satyagraha was held, many illiterate, ignorant women gave generously in the form of subscriptions, since they felt that something very important for the welfare of the community was taking place.

When middle-class women paid subscriptions or made donations out of their husbands' income or their own money, they would ask for reimbursements from their husbands. But untouchable women gave whatever financial help they could out of money earned though *their own labour;* that made it all the more valuable.

In Shiwadi New Labour Camp, untouchable women donated Rs.101 to the building fund on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti.[26]

Even on family occasions like weddings or naming ceremonies, there would be speeches before the assembled guests and funds would be collected for the movement. At Sitabardi in Nagpur, a daughter was born to Bajirao Patil. A women's meeting was held on the occasion with Tuljabai Meshram in the chair. Parvatibai Patil gave a speech, and Rs. 1.50 was donated to the *Janata* newspaper.[27] When a daughter was born to Rukmini Dongre in Indore, a meeting was held and speeches were made by Vithabai Masade and Sitabai Waghmare.[28]

When the Mahaad satyagraha was held, women from Goregaon and Thorle Tandve contributed to the funds.[29] The bloodshed and

the beatings of untouchables that occurred on this occasion were not reported objectively in the press. Newspapers like *Chabukswaar, Kesari, Navaa Kaal* gave a biased picture of the injustice suffered by Dalits during the satyagraha. In order to make sure that this should not happen in future, and further that news about the movement and its ideology should get across effectively to the people, Babasaheb Ambedkar started newspapers like *Bahishkrut Bhaarat, Mooknayak* and *Janata*. Appeals for contributions to these newspapers were made at meetings of untouchables, and the women responded by giving generously. These women were not literate, they did not even know what a newspaper was, but they responded to the atmosphere of awareness stirred up by the meetings, assemblies and other events happening around them. Among the contributors of funds were women from all castes: Mahaar, Maang, Chambhar, Dhor. The women from Mahaad tehsil even contributed sums of four or eight annas for *Bahishkrut Bharat* newspaper.[30]

The Dalit Mahila Mandal of Pune held a haldikunku programme under the leadership of Bhimabai Chavan and sent a donation of Rs. 5 to the *Janata* paper. In Pune, it was decided to send a written declaration of respect to Babasaheb; 43 untouchable women contributed to the fund on that occasion.[31] Ambedkar started a building fund so that untouchables should have a public building of their own. Money was collected from villages all over for this fund, and women played a major part. In Mumbai schoolgirls collected money for the fund by selling badges bearing a picture of Ambedkar.[32] Sugandhabai Irappa Jadhav, mother of *Janata's* distribution agent Sambhajirao Jadhav, hearing that Babasaheb was coming to Latur and that there would be a chance to get a *darshan* of him, gave Rs. 101 for the building fund.[33] She was the first untouchable woman to donate such a large sum.

When Babasaheb held a meeting in the village of Nipani, the entire cost of the meeting was borne by an old untouchable woman named Mirabai.[34] This readiness to contribute generously exists among the dalit women even today.

When people of the untouchable community decided to convert to Buddhism in 1956 following Ambedkar, a Buddha Vihar was established in Pune in 1954 before the conversion.[34] Afterwards, a number of Buddha Vihars were built and the Buddhist faith was revived. Many neo-Buddhist women still contribute what they can to these Buddha Vihars and other social organisations, holding to the view that they owe something to their community.

Endnotes

1 *Janata*, 2nd May 1936: In the *Dnyanprakash* meeting held on 3rd February 1932 under the chairmanship of Shri Rajbhoj, untouchable girls recited dialogues and songs. In Karachi city, on the occasion of the celebration of Ambedkar's birthday by the Mahaar Seva Sangh, Shevanti Mane, Thombre , Savitribai Kamble and Hirabai Tirkas were the girls who sang songs.
Navaa Kaal, 30th June 1936: 400 untouchable girls were present at the felicitation of Dr. Kurtakoti Shankaracharya in Pune, and untouchable girls from Narayan Peth sang welcome songs.
Janata, 24th February 1949: In Dr. Ambedkar's huge meeting held in Bombay on 17th February, Miss Godavari Rokade and Miss Ramachandra sang songs of social uplift.
2 *Dnyanprakaash*, 21st March 1927: When the 7th meeting of the C.P. Berar Mahaar Parishad was held on 20th March 1927, touchable and untouchable women sat together to hear the speech by V.R. Shinde on "Brahmins and non-Brahmins".
3 *Dnyanprakash*, 25th January 1929.
4 *Dnyanprakash*, 2nd January 1925.
5 Moon, Vasant: *Ambedkarpoorva Dalit Chalval*, p.188.
6 *Vividh Vrutta*, 10th February 1929.
7 *Dnyanprakash*, 22nd October 1935.
8 *Nava Kaal*, 2nd June 1926.
9 *Nava Kaal*, 16th August 1939.
10 *Janata*, 3rd November 1951.
11 *Janata*, 11th December 19
12 Patitpaavan Das, a name adopted by one of Ambedkar's followers. He was elected Chairman of the Satyagraha Committee in the Nashik temple entry campaign. He ran the newspaper *Patitpaavan* from 1936 to 1937.
13 *Nava Kaal*, 21st April 1936. (Manmad, Chairperson: Mrs. Gangubai Gangurde)
14 *Janata*, 25th April 1936. (Telkhora, chairperson: Sarlabai Kamble)
15 *Janata*, 25th April 1936. In the birthday celebrations at Bhagur, Rambhabai Unhavane, Tarabai Pagare made speeches.
16 *Janata*, 25th April 1936. Laxmibai Pundalikbuva made a speech at the Ambedkar
17 *Janata*, 2nd May 1936. Sakhubai Sankarrao Barve spoke at the birthday celebrations at Kasara.

18 *Janata*, 2nd May 1936.
19 *Janata*, 18th April 193
20 *Patitpaavan*, 12th September 1936.
21 *Vividh Vrutta*, 9th July 1933: Meeting of untouchables in the Fort area, Bombay, 24th June 1933.
22 *Janata*, 2nd July 1938.
Janata, 30th March 1938.
Janata, 25th April 1940.
23 *Janata*, 25th April 1940.
24 *Janata*, 21st June 1941.
25 *Janata*, 27th April 1946. (The *Janata* praised the women for the courage they displayed.)
26 *Janata*, 14th April 1948.
27 *Janata*, 26th October 1940.
28 *Janata*, 22nd March 1927.
29 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 4th November 1927.
30 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 4th November 1927: Those who gave funds for the satyagraha at Goregaon (Mahaad): Women who donated Re. 1/- :
Laxmibai Vitthal Goregaonkarin, Tulsabai Dhondu Joshi, Muktabai R. Goregaonkarin, Aanibai Joshi, Gangabai Sajan Goregaonkarin, Saavlibai Bhaaguji Joshi, Janaabai Joshi (Jadhav) the elder — Tandve.
31 *Dnyaanprakash*, 4th May 1932.
32 *Janata*, 3rd May 1953.
33 *Janata*, 28th March 1953.
34 *Varaale*, p. 152.

5

Organising Against Religious Prostitution

The untouchable community was the victim of the inappropriate and harmful customs and traditions of Hinduism. It suffered social boycott, of course, but it was also hemmed in by poverty and ignorance. Besides this, the custom of making some individuals into *devadasis* (women servants of god, dedicated to the temple god and forced into religious prostitution), *vaghya-muralya* (ritual dancers, both male and female), *jogtya* (constrained to roam from village to village and beg in the name of religion) or *potraj* (usually men of the Maang caste, supposed to absorb the evil spirits that might affect others) was an assault on their sense of humanity. Because of beliefs and doubts about the auspicious and the inauspicious, and belief in ghosts and spirits of the dead, the very life of untouchables was as if gnawed from within. As early as 1908, some activists from the untouchable community were making efforts to overcome this sense of emptiness and to lift up the whole community. Babasaheb's close friend Shivram Jaanba Kamble started the rebellion by writing an article opposing the undesirable custom of dedicating young girls to the god in his small monthly newsletter *Somwanshi Mitra* in 1908.

Shivram Jaanba's article evoked an excellent response: a murali named Shivubai Wallad (patronymic) Laxman Jadhav-Sonkamble wrote an extremely revealing letter, which was published in the supplement to the issue of *Somwanshi Mitra* dated 1st December 1908. This unlettered, ignorant girl had got someone to write the letter for her, expressing the sorrows of a girl who is given to the god as a murali. She says: "Because of the harmful custom of dedicating muralis which prevails in the Somwanshi caste, parents give up their daughters to the village god Khandoba. Parents are responsible for inflicting this punishment on their daughters. The girls are not at fault. Everybody* is not a murali. Most of us behave like women from good families....

"If muralis enter the Muslim or Christian faith, they are accepted in that faith. Their children are treated well. But muralis do not find acceptance in our (Hindu) faith. Nobody gives their daughters in marriage to our sons. It's no use for you politicians to criticise us or blame us; that will not solve this problem. The *Panch* (patriarchal caste body of village elders) should free us from social denigration, help us to follow a righteous path and so bring our story to a happy ending....

"Nowadays remarriages take place in the upper castes. Divorces take place, widows don't have their heads shaved, or immolate themselves as satis, if these things can change then you should put an end to the practice of dedicating muralis."

After Shivubai's letter was published, the editor of this newsletter, Shivram Jaanba Kamble, received a large number of letters expressing the reactions of readers. Among them Shripatrao Ramji Thorat's response is the most enlightening.

Thorat expressed the optimistic view that the practice of leaving girls in the temple to be muralis should be discontinued, and criticised this and other Hindu religious customs in the harshest words. He came down heavily on practices such as that of sending one's own daughter-in-law to the guru, which still occurs among the Gujarati Vaani Bhatye people of the Vallabhachari sect, and so on.

Shripatrao asked: "Children are born as a boon from Khandoba. So if a girl is born she is a child of the god, then how can she be married to him?"[1]

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* Translator's note : Every girl from the Somwanshi caste.

It is also important to note what the editor of *Somwanshi Mitra,* Shivram Kamble says in response to Shivubai's letter: "that the parents of the girl and her caste kin should think carefully and understand that the practice of making a girl a murali is a blot on our community." He exhorts them to come together to wash it out completely.

Shivram Jaanba Kamble's exhortation appears to have had a widespread impact on readers. Shivram Tatyaba Tambate, in a letter thanking Kamble, says, "There is a very bad tradition among us. The credulous among us believers send their daughters to become Muralis, *Jogtins, Araadhinis.* Because of this contemptible custom many sisters leave the righteous path and take to prostitution, and later become destitute. So we should not make girls into muralis. We should purify those who have already become muralis, and try to bring them back to the path of righteousness."[2]

Kamble did not rest with merely printing the items relating to Shivubai, but in the issue of his newsletter dated 1st March 1909, he printed the following letter of appeal to readers: "In order that the correspondence regarding muralis should not remain on paper only, we have decided to collect signatures on a pamphlet to find out how many persons agree with us on this matter. The text of this pamphlet is as follows: - 'Sensitive persons have begun to feel that the custom in our Somwanshi community of handing girls over to become muralis is very bad. This letter of appeal has been issued so that many muralis and men wishing to marry them may experience the joys of married life. We request that the people of our caste should give thought to this. Firstly, our people should not send girls to be muralis. Secondly, wherever there are muralis at present and where men wish to marry them, the caste community should give them permission to do so. Only those persons who agree on these two points should sign this paper. (Signed: Shivram Jaanba Kamble, Shripat Ramji Thorat, Jordas Ramji Bhalerao) Those who accept our request should write and let us know, and we will gladly send them the paper, and if they sign and return it to us we will be eternally obliged to them."[3]

Shivram Jaanba Kamble further informed his readers that: "The government itself has brought out a bill declaring that, according to Clause 373 of the Indian Penal Code, whosoever shall sell a girl under 16 years of age into prostitution or any immoral occupation or shall try to do so, will be liable for a sentence of 10 years' rigorous imprisonment. What this means is that parents and guardians should not send their girls to become muralis, they should look after them properly and set them on the right path, or else the government will impose a fine or punishment on such criminal parents and guardians."[4]

Having imparted this information to the readers of *Somwanshi Mitra,* Shivram Jaanba Kamble made the following request to the government : " The government should maintain a register of all those who are muralis at present. The names of the muralis should be noted therein and they should be given a certificate of being a murali with the signature of the *Maamledar* (district government official). Thus no-one will be able to make their daughter into a new murali and cheat the government by claiming that she had become a murali earlier."

He requested the government that, further, "Muralis, Jogtins, Aradhinis and such women beg on the streets while singing obscene *laavanis.* This should be banned. All the laws that are enacted concerning *kasbins* (prostitutes) should be made applicable to muralis, because they too are evidently prostitutes."[5]

The resolution that was passed by the Bombay Presidency was later adopted by the government of the 'jat' state within its jurisdiction.[6]

It is clear from the above how aware Shivram Jaanba Kamble and other activists from the untouchable community like him were regarding women's issues, and how they worked to free women from injustice and to ensure their progress.

The reformers of the untouchable community did not display courage only in their speech, but they acted courageously too. They made energetic efforts to bring about the marriages of girls whose lives were being wasted because they had become muralis,

and to set them on the right path. Shivram Jaanba Kamble organised a conference of the Somwanshi (Mahaar) community in Jejuri and got resolutions passed in village assemblies *(panch)* all over to the effect that parents should not make their daughters into muralis and that they should bring about marriages of muralis. As a result, the attitude of the untouchable community towards muralis can be seen to have begun to undergo a gradual change.

An educated youth named Ganpatrao Hemantrao Gaikwad, resident of Khadki, married Shivubai whose letter had been published in the *Somwanshi Mitra* on 18th April 1909.[7] This marriage was approved by the people of the Mahaar, Maang, Dhor, Chambhar and other castes regarded as untouchables. Their main political leaders and prominent persons in villages all over the state gave their approval and showed their support by attending the marriage feast. In Kolhapur too, the untouchable castes began to make efforts to arrange the marriages of muralis with those who were willing.[8]

Even as young men of their own community were coming forward to marry muralis, some Muslims were also choosing muralis as wives so that they would have their own homes and the right to the joys of married life. Shri Shripat Thorat has given an example of this in the *Somwanshi Mitra* of 1st August 1909. On 19th July 1909, a murali named Vithabai was converted to Islam and engaged to her Muslim lover. Thorat reports this and asks, "rather than converting to another faith in order to get engaged, would it not be better to marry within one's own community? Those who despise reforms would do well to consider this."

Kamble and his co-workers went from village to village to preach against the custom of dedicating muralis. A conference of waghyas and muralis lasting for three and a half hours was also held in Jejuri.[9] The people sat still all this time. Listening to the speech of Shivram Jaanba Kamble opposing the custom of dedicating muralis and hearing about his efforts and his work caused great agitation among the assembled waghyas and muralis and also among their patrons and protectors.

The murali tradition was very strong in Jejuri. An activist named Nanyaba Jokhoba Somwanshi had started working here for the eradication of this custom.[10]

Although her foolish and cruel father had dedicated her to Khandoba, a woman called Bhagubai in Karachi was devoted to Shri Premdas Buwa. She lived with him faithfully and with love till the end of her days.[11]

When this woman died of *gandmaala* (inflammation of the glands of the neck), her last rites should, according to tradition, have been carried out by other muralis. When the well-known and respected saadhu Tulsidas Bhadangdas performed the rites, there was considerable agitation within the caste panchayat and the community, but those who carried out the rites ignored this. Shivram Kamble applauded this act, and announced his intention to publish one year's issues of *Somwanshi Mitra* in the form of a book, with four photographs. One was a photograph of leading women of the Somwanshi caste from Pune. Another showed Ganpatrao Hanmantrao Gaikwad and his wife Shivubai. From the above we can see how S.J. Kamble worked day and night to bring respectability to the muralis and also encouraged others to do the same.

After the government enacted a law banning the murali tradition, those who gave away their daughters as muralis were convicted and punished. The British government was considerably vigilant about social questions.

A person named Kisan, of the Somwanshi caste, was sentenced to one day's imprisonment and fined ten rupees for having given his thirteen-year-old daughter to be a murali in Jejuri. He was given this mild punishment because he asked for pardon in the court.[12]

A Somwanshi woman named Mahalu lived in the first lane in Kamathipura in Mumbai. She made an eleven-year-old girl named Sundri, whom she was bringing up, into a murali. Mahalu testified that Sundri's brother had asked her on his deathbed to make his sister a murali. Even so, Mahalu was sentenced to four months'

rigorous imprisonment. A couple named Kondabai and Rama were also accused of having helped in making Sundri a Murali, but they were let off for want of evidence.[13]

The British regime of the time helped Shivram Jaaanba Kamble in his movement for the abolition of the murali tradition by implementing the law against it. As a result, in the Khandoba Yatra at Jejuri in 1910, not a single girl was dedicated to the god as a murali at full moon in the month of Chaitra. Among the social reformers who worked for the liberation of 'fallen' women at the time, Shivram Jaaanba Kamble's efforts were unprecedented. Thus one can call Shivram Jaaanba Kamble the founder of the movement for reform of Devadasis. We see that the outcaste communities carried on work of a similar nature later on under Babasaheb's leadership.

In the meeting of outcastes held at Nerle in the Hukkeri tehsil, district Belgaon, on 19th May 1927, under the leadership of Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil, a resolution was passed to the effect that untouchables should not dedicate jogtins and muralis and that they should accept Jogtins and muralis in marriage.[14]

The gods of the Hindu religion so favoured girls of the untouchable community that a girl who was not allowed to enter the temple of the god could however become the wife of that god, or even be dedicated to a goddess. The muralis of Khandoba and the devadasis of Yellamma are well known for this. What is more, even the god Maruti, famous as a lifelong celibate and considered to be the ideal devotee of the monogamous Lord Rama, was no exception to this custom of marriage to muralis.

On Saturday, 15th October 1927, at 10 to 11 in the night, three girls from the untouchable Kongati caste (from Karnataka), living in the Worli Chawl were married to the god Maruti in the well-known temple opposite the Worli post office in Mumbai. The marriage was celebrated by the temple priest and the girls'relatives in style with all the usual rituals of a wedding.[15] The girls' names were Ulgawwa, Damawwa and Durgawwa, and two of them were about eleven years old while the third was fourteen or fifteen. These weddings were performed with the intention of

dedicating the girls to the goddess Yellamma as jogtins, and then forcing them to a life of prostitution.

Activists of the untouchable community were making efforts to keep girls from their caste away from prostitution, to set them on the right path and to give them protection. In 1926 a Young Mahaars' Association was established in Nagpur. This association brought some 20-odd girls who had joined the Muslim faith back into their community and arranged their marriages within the caste. A Mahaar girl named Mahananda from Wardha and a girl called Maina from the Gond community were rescued from the Ganga-Jamuna brothel in Nagpur and sent to Seva Sadan, where they were given an education. Later on they both became nurses.[16]

We can see that young men in those days felt strongly about the rehabilitation of these 'fallen' women, and that they were also prepared to act on those feelings in actual practice. The women were not far behind. They were always conscious that women of the untouchable community must strive to lead a respectable life.

In the weekly bazaar in Kamathi near Nagpur, local Muslim hoodlums would keep a watch on women selling their wares and act collectively to lure them away. To deal with this situation, Babu Hardas, a leading Ambedkarite activist of the Vidarbha region, organised the Mahaar youth to protect these girls from the hoodlums. As a part of this effort, the local association of dalit women held a meeting of their untouchable sisters at the Kacheri bazaar in Kamathi on 2nd November 1940, to persuade the women not to sit in the Kamathi weekly bazaar and to form a Kacheri Bazaar Bhagini Mandal instead.[17]

To attract attention to the plight of the 'fallen' women, pamphlets were issued and public meetings held in which these issues were discussed before the people. At Indora in Nagpur, according to a printed pamphlet, a talk was held on 7th December 1930 on the subject of Protection of Our Faith and the Reform of Fallen Women. On this occasion, an appeal from a woman who had been abandoned by her husband named Sahni Javaje Doma Mahaar was discussed before the assembled audience.

While untouchable activists were involved with the cause of liberation of devadasis, muralis and other prostitutes, the Hindu social reformers did not concern themselves much with this issue. A dancer named Devaki from Kerala wrote an open letter to Mahatma Gandhi asking him to "liberate the devadasis".[18] But no respectable member of the Hindu religion took up her cause, nor is there any record of Gandhiji having done anything for her. In the end she embraced the Christian faith.

The Ambedkarite activists had organised a conference of devadasis, muralis, jogtins and other such women at the Damodar Hall in Parel (Mumbai) on 13th June 1936.The speech that Babasaheb Ambedkar made on that occasion is very important and enlightening. He advised the women, "You are the cause of shame for our community. Women should be the jewels of the community. Every society gives great importance to the question of women's moral character. So you should give up this unclean life and improve your own name and that of our community. When I tell you to give up this despicable life it does not mean that I will make other means of earning your living available to you. Recall the example of Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*. Just as Draupadi suffered a life of poverty with her husband while in exile, so you too will have to suffer. Character is more important than wealth."[19] As a result of this speech, several women gave up their occupation as prostitutes and went to Babasaheb saying, "We are willing to take up married life."After this Babasaheb arranged the marriages of a number of prostitutes.[20]

But these scattered efforts proved inadequate to free dalit society of prostitution. This was because this occupation had, and still has, religious sanction. If these practices were to be removed from dalit society, its religious base would first have to be abolished, as Babasaheb was well aware. That is why he did not, later on, spend much time on the issue of liberation etc., of prostitutes. After conversion to Buddhism, the problem of girls being dedicated to the god would cease to exist, as no religion other than Hinduism dedicates its girls to the service of the god in this way. After the adoption of Buddhism, the devadasi tradition has

disappeared completely from among the converted Mahaars. What remains of the tradition exists among dalits and untouchables who are still within the Hindu fold. Those who followed Ambedkar's path have gained freedom from this cruel custom.

Endnotes

1 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st January 1909.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid. We have quoted this pamphlet in the contemporary Marathi used in the press at the time.
4 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st August 1909.
5 Ibid.
6 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st September 1909.
7 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st May 1910.
8 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st August 1909.
9 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st May-1st June 1909.
10 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st December 1909.
11 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st August 1909.
12 *Somwanshi Mitra*, 1st November 1909.
13 Ibid., 1st December 1909.
14 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 30th June 1927.
15 *Vividhvrutta*, 27th November 1927.
16 Kosare, "Vidarbhaatil Dalit Chalval", p.77.
17 Ibid., p.374: present in this meeting were: Mrs. Bhamabai Manwatkar, chairperson, vice-chairperson Sakhubai Saundole, secretary Janakibai Manwatkar, joint secretary Draupadibai Dahaat, Committee executive Sakhubai Vaasnik, advisors Laxmibai and Mahagabai, treasurer Raibai Khobragade and other members.
18 *Vividhvrutta*, 17th September 1933.
19 *Janata*, 4th July 1936.
20 Tipnis (1962): " Maaza Aadarsh Dr. Ambedkar", article in the annual special issue of Dr. Ambedkar College, Mahaad, 1962.

6

Dalit Women and the Tradition of Marriage

According to the division of labourers which the Varna system brings about (Ambedkar said that the caste system in India brought about not just a division of labour, but a division of labourers), those to whom it falls to perform the lowest and filthiest tasks came to be known as ati-Shudras or untouchables. This fifth class or varna, like the *adivasis* (or indigenous peoples living in jungles or remote areas) were forced to live at a distance from the upper classes. The adivasis lived in hill regions or deep in the jungle, many miles away from urban civilisation. Even today they live like this. And so their ancient traditions and culture handed down through generations, have largely remained as they were.

Like the adivasis, the untouchables who lived outside the periphery of the village had preserved their culture through tradition. In both these ancient cultures there was equality between men and women. Boys and girls who had come of age would marry through mutual agreement. Women, like men, had the right to divorce. Also, there was no ban on remarriage or marriage of widows, and no practice of sati. Relations between men and women were not antagonistic.

It is said that one root cause underlying this reality was the fact that both these groups of people had no land rights of their own. Rather, these people had to work as labourers on land owned by the upper classes. They had to leave their homes to toil for a living, the women as well as the men. Because the upper classes owned land, the concept of inheritance rights followed naturally on property rights, and the concept of chastity of women came from the idea of keeping inheritance rights for one's own descendants. To safeguard the chastity of women, it became essential for girls to be married before they reached puberty. Following this, women were shackled into a kind of slavery with the ban on remarriage and marriage of widows, sati and so on. Their shackles were made stronger by the authority of the *Dharmashastras*. Since the untouchables and the adivasis owned no land, the question of property, inheritance rights and the shackles binding women did not arise among them.

In the 100 years after the fall of Peshwa rule, the untouchable settlements outside the village periphery moved closer to the habitations of the upper classes. With the beginnings of education, a process of social evolution was initiated which made significant changes in the lives of the untouchables. Before this, there was a considerable difference between the life styles of untouchables and caste Hindus.

The criteria[1] that were applied in the 1911 Census to identify the untouchables throw light on the distinctions between the untouchables and caste Hindus.

1. Those who deny the domination of the Brahmins
2. Those who do not accept *mantras* from the Brahmins or any Hindu guru.
3. Those who do not believe in the *Vedas*.
4. Those who do not worship Hindu gods.
5. Those with whom the Brahmins do not accept employment.
6. Those whom a Brahmin priest *(purohit)* does not visit.
7. Those who are not allowed entry in the sanctum sanctorum of a temple.
8. Those who cause caste pollution.

9. Those who bury their dead.
10. Those who eat the meat of cows and do not hold the cow to be holy.

Some of these criteria also apply to adivasi castes and communities. The distinctive character of the untouchables based on the above criteria gradually wore away through contact with the caste Hindus. The habitations of the untouchables, although outside the village periphery, were, unlike those of the adivasis, near the village boundary. Because of this, and because of the tasks that the untouchables were assigned according to the traditional caste division of labour in the village *(gaongaada)*, they continuously came in contact with the upper castes and began to imitate their ways. They say that even caste came into existence because of such imitation. In the formation of castes, according to Ambedkar, the Brahmins bound themselves first of all and created a caste for themselves, the rest of society imitated them and so other castes came into being.[2] It is possible that the concept of female chastity in the tying of the marriage bond, and the practice of child marriage, came to the untouchables from the upper castes through imitation of this kind.

Poverty was also a cause underlying child marriage. Manpower was needed to look after the household together with work outside the home, and for this reason, early marriage, early childbearing and many children was the policy. To free oneself of the responsibility of one's daughter was also a consideration. Later, when the untouchable leadership enlightened people about the dangers in early marriage, untouchable activists began to pass resolutions imposing bans on child marriages in public meetings, and to implement these bans. Women too began to oppose early marriage.[3]

A meeting of untouchables was held at Ambarnath, in the Kalyan tehsil of Thane district on 9th August 1927. In this meeting it was resolved that the age for marriage should be 22 years for boys and 16 for girls and that parents should not arrange their children's marriages below this age. On 28th March 1934, a resolution was passed at the conference of untouchable women in Malkapur that

the Sharda Bill (banning child marriage) be implemented.[4]

With the new wave of liberal thinking from England, social reformers began to focus their attention on harmful traditions in the society. Issues like child marriage, marriage of widows and remarriage of women were in fact related to the reform of the family. In this regard, within caste Hindu society, not only the men but even the women held traditional reactionary views. Thus, in their attempt to root out these reactionary traditions, the reformers had to resort to the law as a means. In this context even those leading intellectuals who claimed to be social reformers adopted a defeatist stand.

For example, in October 1873 the leading reformer Justice Ranade lost his wife. Ranade's age at the time was 32 years. Immediately after this he married an eleven-year-old girl.[5]

We see that Ranade took a similarly defeatist stand with regard to widow remarriage. When his sister became a widow, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule advised him to take this opportunity to arrange her marriage in order to set an example before society. But Ranade took a defeatist stand on this, saying that it would cause great sorrow to his father and that the Brahmins would boycott him.[6]

If this was the attitude of the social reformers of Phule's time, the following example will illustrate that of the orthodox Hindus even 50 years later. The questionnaire that was placed for discussion before the grand conference of Brahmins at Kashi (Benares) in 1928 and the authoritative answers given by the religious gurus make the views of the orthodoxy very clear. These answers were written in Sanskrit, and later translated into Marathi and published as a pamphlet[7] bearing the signatures of Messrs Sangacharya Reddy, Gopal Dandgaonkar, Rangnath Shaharkar, Vishwas Balwant Daavre, Vishnu Narayan Mavaal, Vidyadhar Krushnaji Shaharkar and Tryambak Narhar Shrigodekar. These individuals had gone to Kashi as representatives of the Vidvatsabha and the Shukla Yajurvediya Maadhyandin Maharashtriya Brahmansabha, an association of the orthodox in a particular sub-caste of Brahmins.
The questions and answers are as follows:

Question 1 : What are the limits of age at marriage for men and women as sanctioned by the Shastras?

Question 3 : Should the marriage of a woman taking place after she reaches puberty be considered main,* inferior or proscribed by the *dharma?*

Answers to Q 1 and 3 : The main period for marriage of women is from the time of conception to the age of eight years. The ninth and tenth years are medium. The period after the onset of puberty is an inferior time, and marriage after she has undergone the rites of puberty is to be criticised in every way.

Question 2 : In the present situation, and following the Shastras, what restrictions on the age of marriage would it be appropriate to enact in the law?

Answer : Even in the present situation, it would be inappropriate to enact a law proscribing marriages between eight years and the onset of puberty.

Question 4 : What is the content of the dictum for girls of the Kunbi caste after they have reached puberty?

Answer : The purport of the dicta regarding Kunbi girls may be understood as being about fitness to carry out religious duties. (The statement that appears in the *Kesari* of 20th November 1928, that it cannot be atoned for even through penance, is without foundation.)

Question 5 : Is it permissible or not for Brahmins and other castes to have marriage bonds with other sub-castes?

Answer : Marriages between different sub-castes are to be deplored.

Question 6 : Who were the knowers of the dharma? What kind of changes can they make in the dharma? Of a proscriptive or a prescriptive nature?

Answer : The knowers of the dharma were Manu and those who followed him. Even they did not have the right to change the dharma independently.

* Translator's note : or usual

Question 7 : Are the marriage of widows and sacrifice of the marriage bond (divorce) appropriate, inappropriate or to be deplored?

Answer : Widow remarriage and divorce are completely prohibited among the three upper Varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.

When the religious gurus themselves have given their injunctions regarding women with such a lack of humanity, how can we expect the development and improvement of women's situation to take place within this religion?

The Hindu *Dharmashastras* began to reach the untouchable through emulation and to take root in the name of tradition. Until about a century after the fall of the Peshwas, the untouchable people would have their marriages, etc., performed by purohits or priests from their own community. These priests were called *gosavibuwa*. In some regions, persons from the nomadic Jangam caste would perform the marriages of untouchables. A gosavibuwa named Balakdas wrote a Purana entitled Mahaar Mahaatmya (the Greatness of the Mahaars). The place of publication given at the end of the book is Paadegaon on the banks of the Neera river in Pune district and the date of publication is 1788.[8]

These purohits narrate tales of Hindu gods and goddesses, sing bhajans and keertans, and carry out poojas and funeral rites as well as performing marriages. What is more, even women would perform marriage rituals, poojas and bhajans. Women were not prevented from carrying out priestly duties in the untouchable community.

In the family of the Mahaar Arjun Chimaji Pawar in the village of Phansaawale in Ratnagiri tehsil, Ratnagiri district, the tradition of performing marriages of untouchables has been carried on for many generations. In this family, around 1860, the sister of Arjun Pawar's grandfather Haribuwa, named Phatiakka, also known as Baye, used to carry out religious rites for her own caste of Mahaars as her husband Khavalekar was in the British army. Baye would perform marriages and also give sermons to the women of her

community on occasion. She was a woman purohit from the untouchable community.[9]

Marriage is a contract between two persons, but in Hinduism it has been given the status of a sacred rite. Marriage is a bond which should be tied with the taking of solemn oaths by the couple, so that their future life together may be smooth. Thus there is a need for the presence of a witness, but otherwise the rest of the marriage ceremony only has significance as a celebration and a festive occasion for guests. This festivity has been given undue importance as a religious rite and the purohit who carries out this religious rite has been given an even more important, or dominant, status. The families of the bride and groom are milked clean by this purohit's demands for *dakshina* (the fees paid to a Brahmin priest for performing his religious duties) and the costs of the marriage rituals; they often go into debt.

It was with all this in mind that Mahatma Jyotiba Phule in 1873 initiated a simple but revolutionary new form of the marriage ceremony. Phule prepared a set of vows for the marriage ceremony whereby the bride and groom pledged to live together faithfully. The couple would speak the vows in verse form in the presence of witnesses, and all those present would bestow their blessings on the couple in one voice. There was no other ritual. Between 25th December 1873 and 7th May 1874 Phule carried out two marriages according to this new ceremonial form.[10] This became a vital part of the Satyashodhak movement. It is worth noting that a similar ceremony based on taking of vows became the norm in Buddhist society after the conversion of untouchables to Buddhism.

The marriage rituals of the untouchables were different from those of the three other castes. The gifting of the daughter *(Kanyadaan)* and the seven circlings of the sacred fire, essential in caste Hindu marriages, did not form a part of the marriage ceremony among untouchables. Thus the idea that the bride should be gifted like an object and that the groom would gain ownership rights over her, was not prevalent among them. However, practices like the smearing of turmeric paste on the body, tying the sacred

thread, going to Kashi (Benares) as a compulsory duty, and the making of a great drama by the groom's family of taking offence about gifts and traditional ceremonies, had all become customary among the untouchables. With all these elaborate ceremonials, the marriage function would go on for four or five days. This meant that a lot of time and money were wasted.

Ambedkar recognised the importance of this simple form of marriage initiated by the Satyashodhak movement. He and his followers would take the opportunity of advising people to adopt this form whenever they made speeches in various places. A marriage according to this improved pattern was performed during the assembly of the untouchable community held in Paturdi in Berar province, with Babasaheb presiding, on 25th May 1929.[11]

Claiming that the untouchables were an integral part of Hinduism and that they had the same religious rites as the others, Babasaheb had the initiation ceremony (for boys) performed within the untouchable community by Hindu purohits. He also made the experiment of carrying out weddings of untouchables according to Vedic rites, with the same objective.

The wedding of Keshav Govind Adarekar and Miss Vithabai Tidekar was performed according to Vedic rituals in the Damodar Hall in Parel, Mumbai on 29th June 1929 at 5.30 p.m. in the presence of Babasaheb and Ramabai Ambedkar.[12] The purohit at this wedding was Acharya Sundarrao Vaidya.

Keshavrao Adarekar was the treasurer and a respected member and organiser of the Mahaar Seva Sangh. His father Adarekarbaba was also a supporter of reforms and held liberal views. His bride Vithabai was educated and well versed in household duties. Her mother held traditional views, but her father was a liberal. The daughter, like her father, was a supporter of modern ideas.

This was the first wedding of untouchables performed according to Hindu rites before the fire god, in the presence of caste Hindu witnesses in a full assembly of untouchables. Usually in an untouchable wedding the god Agni would not be present, and there would be no seven rounds of the sacred fire.

In this wedding, customs practised from ancient times like the

application of turmeric paste to the body, hiding betel nuts about the persons of the bride and groom, breaking the paan with the mouth, *maase karvine,* the worship of the grinding-stone, the tying of paper ornaments at the front and back of the head of the groom's father and the farce of sending him to Kashi, were all dispensed with.

The songs sung while bathing the bride and groom, the songs that were always sung at weddings : "the stars with the moon, Laxmi with Vishnu, Saavitri with Satyavaan, Damayanti with Nala...", the comic songs sung by the bridesmaids, were not sung here either.

Leading women activists were present at this wedding to publicly express their sympathy and support.[13] Photographs were also taken. Ramabai Ambedkar, Laxmibai Ambedkar and other women were present. Among the men present at this wedding were C.K.Bole, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Shivtarkar, Dr. Solanki, Deorao Naik, Gaikwad, Pradhan, Chitre and others.

Another similar wedding took place in Ahmednagar district. This was the first such wedding of untouchables in that region performed according to the Vedic rites.[14]

Some social reformers also came forward to try and change the marriage customs. They founded societies with the objective of giving support and encouragement to weddings of this new type. Some women were also among them.[15]

When people gathered on the occasion of a wedding, it was usual to tell them stories and give them advice, etc. At the wedding of Rambhau Harinath Bagul and Phulabai Savate at Mahu (the princely state), it was resolved to support the conversion of untouchables.[16] On this occasion, about seven hundred persons from the princely states of Mahu, Indore, Dhaar, Devaas, Ujjain etc., were present.

Social reformers began to work for the removal of harmful customs, traditions and practices that had spread among the untouchables through emulation of the upper castes. The practice of taking decisions collectively, which was customary throughout all federal states, was also prevalent through the 53 different sub-

castes among the Mahaars. In Vidarbha, there were twelve and a half sub-castes such as Laadvan, Baarke, Baavne etc., and bel Mahaar, paan Mahaar etc., in the Konkan; elsewhere there were sub-castes such as the Somwanshi. S.M. Mate in his book, *The Problem of the Untouchables* has given the names of 53 sub-castes of the Mahaars.[17]

These sub-castes would resolve disputes and quarrels among themselves through their own caste panchayats, or patriarchal caste bodies. Similarly, they would also allow new rules related to social reforms to be made, which would be binding on all, and would be conveyed to members of the community through printed pamphlets.

The reforms implemented with regard to women by the sub-caste panchayats in Vidarbha between about 1920 and 1925 are remarkable, and read as follows:[18]

(1) In engagement and marriage ceremonies the value of saris and blouse lengths distributed to guests should not be more than Rs. 50. (2)At the wedding, the parents of the groom should not press the parents of the bride for gifts of jewellery. Whatever jewellery is gifted should not be of a value greater than Rs.60. (3) Dowry should not be given with the bride. (4) If a married woman goes with another man, the first husband should not be fined. (5) The restrictions imposed because of the belief that women working as nurses, compounders, doctors etc., bring pollution on the caste should be removed. (6) Common dining and marriage bonds between sub-castes should be allowed.

Within the untouchable community, women had the right to divorce and remarriage. Husbands and wives were granted divorce by the caste panchayats. Questions arising in this context would be resolved by attempts to find a golden mean acceptable to all. Untouchable leaders were also vigilant that the ease of obtaining divorce should not be abused. Their approach was that "If a woman has a husband and, without reason, mischievously, gives him up, or if a husband leaves his wife, all attempts should be made to bring the couple together."[19]

Mixed Marriages

The grand conference of Brahmins at Kashi (Benares) had forbidden inter-caste marriages. Thus mixed marriages were considered a social crime among the three upper castes. However, within the (fourth) Shudra varna and the (outcaste) untouchable community, this was considered to be one of the prime objectives of reform within Hindu society and of the dalit movement. Dr. Ambedkar repeatedly declared his support for mixed marriages.

Ambedkar was of the opinion that, "The mixture of blood is the only medicine for creating a fraternal feeling among different castes, and the feeling of segregation created by the caste system will not be destroyed unless a sense of blood relations among the castes is generated on a wide scale."[20]

Some progressive minded persons among the caste Hindus also supported mixed marriages, and on the occasion of such marriages they would organise common meals for people of all castes and call for an end to caste discrimination. At Bhambhurdi, Pune, (now Shivajinagar) in 1927, a Mahaar girl named Shevanta was married to a Maang youth named Narayan Kunde, with the permission of the girl's parents.[21] Also in Pune, a Maang girl from the Ahilya Ashram was married to a Brahmin youth. On that occasion persons of all castes dined together.[22] Another such marriage took place in Pune in November 1928 between Laxmibai Kamble (a Mahaar girl) and Dattaram Rangnath Upaasak (a Maratha boy).[23]

Untouchable social reformers also put in efforts to bring about mixed marriages. A reformer named Vikram Vithoba Sankaavde brought about the marriage of an educated couple.[24] Reformers of the untouchable community also tried to arrange the marriages of orphaned and destitute girls as a means for their rehabilitation,[25] and they would also ensure their absorption into the community. Patitpaavan Das issued a pamphlet urging people not to vote for candidates who opposed mixed marriages.[26] Couples in mixed marriages would be felicitated.[27] These examples show how important the issue of mixed marriages was for untouchable social reformers.

Some of Babasaheb Ambedkar's co-workers, influenced by his progressive thinking and by close association with him, thought of undergoing mixed marriages themselves. The caste Hindu editor of Dr. Ambedkar's journal *Janata,* Shri B.R. Kadrekar, was going to marry an untouchable girl who was an enthusiastic social activist.[28] The untouchable activist D.G. Jadhav went through an inter-caste marriage with the sister of Kamlakant Chitre. Similarly, the editor of *Mooknayak,* Pandurang Bhatkar, married a Brahmin girl even before 1920.

The views of Babasaheb Ambedkar regarding mixed marriages are, of course, expressed in his writings. He also set an example by making a mixed marriage himself, and it was his desire that his son too should marry outside his caste. In a letter written to Bhaurao Patil on 22nd March 1950 he says, "I have read the contents of your letter with regard to Yashwant's marriage. He is free to marry according to his preference. Why has he turned down the girls from Nagpur? I don't know what they look like, but they were well-educated girls. I think Yashwant is not going to marry an educated girl, that is why he is by way of choosing an illiterate girl. I do not agree with his thinking this way. I have not seen the daughter of Shri Rajbhoj. I will not say no to the marriage because she is of a different caste, because I do not believe in such things."[29]

Babasaheb also encouraged mixed marriages by publishing news of such marriages in his paper *Janata* and congratulating the couples in such cases. The issue of the *Janata* weekly dated 2nd June 1955 carries the news of the marriage of the upper-caste bridegroom, Bachchubhai Babubhai, with an untouchable girl, Mangalabai Mahadu, following Vedic rites. It is clear from these incidents that mixed marriages were an important part of Ambedkar's movement to destroy castes within Hinduism.

Arranging Marriages through Advertisements

Even today, among the upper castes, arranging marriages through placing advertisements in newspapers is considered a somewhat inferior option; and so they miss out on a most effective method. The untouchable community, however, had adopted this

progressive method of arranging marriages early in the twentieth century.

In the *Bahishkrut Bhaarat* of 22nd April 1927, the following "groom wanted' advertisement appeared: " Groom Wanted: caste Mahaar, educated, well-built but aged under 25 years. The girl is educated up to the 7th standard (Marathi), quite fair-complexioned, good-looking, modest and healthy. Age above 15. The girl has no parents, but her guardians are willing to give financial help so that her married life may be happy. Those interested should write to the address given below."[30]

With a view to the overall progress of untouchable women, some reformers also started homes for orphans and widows. Shri Jhabu Shahu Shirsat, an untouchable reformer from Akola, founded such a home on 5th June 1938, according to a printed paper.

We can see from this discussion that dalit activists were making efforts to reform the customs and traditions relating to marriage in their community. We can conclude that bringing about reforms such as performing marriages with a minimum of expenditure because of the condition of economic deprivation in the community, leaving out the unnecessary rituals and ceremonies, trying to integrate society through mixed marriages between castes and sub-castes, encouraging the desirable traditions like widow remarriage etc., was a major theme of the Ambedkar movement.

Endnotes

1 *Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches*, Volume 5.
2 Ibid., Vol. I, p.18-19.
3 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, September 1927.
4 *Janata*, 21st April 1934.
5 Keer, Dhananjay, *Mahatma Phule*, p.156.
6 Ibid.
7 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 29th December 1928.
8 Shinde, V.R., *Bhaartiya Asprushyatecha Prashna*, p.124.
9 This information was obtained from the villagers at Phansavale, with their signatures.
10 Keer, Dhananjay, *Mahatma Phule*, p.150-51
11 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 21st June 1927. Vadhu Raamji Dabhade's daughter Kavatikabai married Sakharam Ingle.
12 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 12th July 1929.
13 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 12th July 1929. Mrs. Bhangarkar, Mrs. Devakabai Satambkar, Mrs. Janaabai Ambedkar, Mrs. Bhimabai Pawar, Mrs. Sakhubai Latvankar (widowed), Mrs. Chandrabai Nimkar, Mrs. Muktabai Satambkar, Mrs. Draupadibai Talwatkar, Mrs. Shakuntala Vanandkar and Akkabai (widowed sister of Dr. Ambedkar) were present.
14 *Janata*, 22nd March 1941. S.V. Gaikwad and Leelavati Adangale were married on 2nd March 1941.
15 Kosare D.L. (1984), *Vidarbha teel Dalitaanchi Chalval*, p. 456 : A society to assist in marriages of reformist untouchables was established at Nagpur in August 1936. Secretary: Anjanabi Deshbhratar, members: Virendrabai Teerhakar, Draupadibai Sakharkar.
16 *Nirbhid*, 2nd February 1936.
17 Mate, S.M.: Asprushyanche Prashna: sub-castes among the Mahaars: (1)Abane, (2)Aandavan or Andhon, (3) Anantakulya, (4)Autakamble, (5) Balti, (6)Baalkamble, (7) Baarke, (8) Baavan or Baavne, (9) Baavcha, (10)Baavise, (11) Bel, Bele, Beliya (12) Ben, (13) Bankar, (14) Bole, (15) Chalekar, (16) Daule, (17) Dhed, (18)Dhaarmik, (19) Dom or Domb, (20) Garadi, (21) Gavsai or Gavshe, (22) Dhadshi, (23) Ghatkamble, (24) Godvan or Gaudvan, (25) Gopal, (26) Hedshi, (27)Holar or Hubal, (28) Haade, (29) Jogti, (30) Junnare, (31) Kabule, (32) Kadvan, (33) Kamble, (34) Kaasare, (35) Khadse, (36) Kochare, Khosare or Kosare (37) Laadvan or Laadhvan, (38) Matkamble, (39) Murali, (40) Nirale, (41) Paan or Paathya, (42) Pradhan, (43) Pulaar, (44) Rati, (45) Saalaadi, Saalaade (46) Silvan, (47) Sirsalkar, (48) Som, Somwanshi, (49) Somkamble, (50) Sonkamble, (51) Sonaibal Kamble, (52) Sutaad, (53) Tilvan.
18 Appeal No. 3 published by the Laadvan Panch Committee, Navi Shukrawari Mahaarpura, Nagpur, 1925.
19 Moon, Vasant, *Ambedkarpoorva Dalit Chalval*, p.18. This was a resolution adopted at the Mahaar parishad held in Nagpur on 13th, 14th and 15th April 1913.
20 Moon, Vasant, *Jaatisanstheche Ucchaatan*, Manovikas Prakashan, p. 86.
21 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 20th May 1927.
22 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 12thApril 1929. Devakibai Gaikwad from the girls' school married Sathe in the presence of the touchables Bhuskute, Thengadi and Mrs. Patade.
23 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 16th November 1928.
24 *Nirbhid*, 8th March 1936.
25 4th and 5th report of the Berar Mahaar Reform Mandal, Yawatmal, 1929. In 1924 the director of the Chokhamela Free Boarding (school), Yawatmal, and secretary of the Mahaar Reform Mandal, Yawatmal, Vitthal Dasharath Masekar, arranged the marriage of an orphaned girl from the boarding school named Kausalya with a student, Shankarrao Dhot.
26 *Patitpaavan*, 26th December 1936.
27 *Arun*, 21st July 1947: On 9th July 1947, the marriage of Bansilal Lokhande (Laadvan sub-caste) with Sakhubai, a Somwanshi Mahaar girl, was solemnised by the Samata Sainik Dal, Nagpur.
28 *Navaa Kaal*, 2nd June 1936.
29 Kharat, Shankarrao, *The Letters of Dr. Ambedkar*, p.284.
30 *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 22nd April 1927.

7

The Struggle for Equality

The untouchables were being awakened through the movement for their liberation even before Ambedkar started his active work. Education had brought a new awareness to the community. But this awakening was limited to a desire for education and some individual efforts were made towards achieving this. Activities aimed at the collective uplift of the whole community were rare.

Individuals and the odd association were taking up issues like access to water, temple entry and caste discrimination, but the response to these scattered efforts, minuscule as compared to the untouchable population of the country, was similar to that evoked by a clod of earth flung into the vast ocean. Activity was limited to presenting demands through individual petitions, applications and appeals. Mass agitations had not taken place.

It was only when the untouchable community gained the determined leadership of Babasaheb Ambedkar that the people's awakening and a people's movement truly began. The life of the untouchables was filled with a new spirit. The people became newly aware about solving their problems collectively and on the strength of their organisation. What is more, everyone became involved in Babasaheb's movement: the poor from the villages, the illiterate and uneducated people and also women. A feeling of self-esteem was generated among the women. They were ready to even face prison with their babies in their arms. With the consciousness that they must themselves fight against the injustice inflicted on them and for their own rights, women began to organise meetings, conferences etc.

The Ambadevi Temple Entry Satyagraha

It was with the claim that "We too are Hindu, so the temples must be open to us" that the untouchables, under Babasaheb Ambedkar's leadership, began an agitation for entry into the Ambadevi temple in Amaravati. Non-Brahmin leaders like Pandharinath Patil and Panjabrao Deshmukh supported this agitation and upheld the principle of temple entry for untouchables.

The untouchables, on the advice of Madhorao Govindrao Meshram, sent a petition asking for entry to the temple to the panch committee of the temple complex. A reply was received from the temple committee saying that this request of the untouchables was extreme, unjust and injurious to the dharma of the varna system and therefore the untouchables should not enter the temple. In response, a resolution was passed at a huge meeting held in Amaravati that, if the temple authorities did not grant entry to the untouchables, they would undertake a satyagraha . The president of the Maratha High School, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh, and its superintendent, Gopalrao Deshmukh, also took part in this agitation of the untouchables.

A special aspect of this agitation was that the Maatang community was opposed to it, and several Maatang individuals submitted their opposition in writing. Among those who opposed the agitation was Bhontekar, the editor of the newspaper *Bhaala* (The Spear), who suggested that untouchables should build their own temples.

Finally, in a compromise with the caste Hindus, the following resolutions regarding entry to the Ambadevi temple were passed:

1. The untouchables should take *darshan* from a position at the railings built at some distance from the idol of the goddess.
2. They should take darshan at specified times only.

3. Both the above rules should be observed strictly.

It was clear that the caste Hindus had conspired to keep the untouchables away from the temple by imposing conditions on them. This was not acceptable to the untouchables and their supporters. On 13th November 1927 a conference of untouchable and caste Hindu leaders was held in Amaravati to carry forward the issue of entry to the Ambadevi temple. Babasaheb Ambedkar presided over the conference, which was attended by Panjabrao Deshmukh, Barrister Tidke, Advocate Chaubal, G.A. Gavai, P.N. Rajbhoj, Dr. Patwardhan, K.B. Deshmukh, Babasaheb Amrutkar, D.V. Naik, Dattatraya Pradhan, Daataar, Kavali, Ravikar and other leaders.*

A procession of thousands of untouchable men was taken out at the time of this conference. There were 50 women among them. A Brahmin bystander watching this procession from the side of the road remarked, "How dare these mahaardas take out a procession", hearing which the untouchables broke into laughter. No untoward incident took place.[1]

The Chavdaar "Tank" Satyagraha at Mahaad

Raobahadur C.K.Bole had mooted a resolution in the Bombay Legislative Council that public watering places, schools, markets and temples should be open for the entry of untouchables. This was passed by the government in 1923. To implement this resolution, Babasaheb Ambedkar decided to conduct a satyagraha at the public tank (reservoir) at Mahaad. The Central Provinces Assembly had also earlier passed a similar resolution.

Babasaheb's place of residence was Mumbai, and his earlist co-workers also came from Mumbai, and from Thane and Colaba districts. They had been respected all through their careers in the army, and did not appreciate being treated contemptuously as Mahaars on their return to their villages after retirement. They, therefore, built separate settlements in Mahaad and began to live there.

* Translator's note : The names listed demonstrate participation of both untouchable and caste Hindu leaders, Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

There were several considerations that influenced Babasaheb's choice of the Chavdaar Tank at Mahaad for his satyagraha. He thought it would be easier to organise a movement with these trained army veterans, assisted by his co-workers. Also, Mahaad was at a convenient distance from Mumbai.

On 19th and 20th March 1927 a conference titled, First Assembly of the Outcastes of Colaba District was held at Mahaad where three thousand persons were present. It was decided that, "The municipality of Mahaad has declared public watering places open to untouchables. So we should commence the practice of drawing water from the Chavdaar tank as of today."

Having resolved thus, Ambedkar together with all the assembled men and women went to the tank, asserted their human right by touching the water in the tank, and then returned peacefully to the hall, after which the assembly was dissolved.

The orthodox caste Hindus spread the word that the tank had been polluted by untouchables, and added that the untouchables were next going to enter the Veereshwar temple. They therefore began to beat up the untouchables who had gathered for the conference.

Claiming that the Mahaad tank was called Choudhury tank and that it was a private tank, they accused the untouchables of trespassing. Of course the claim was false, because a few days later, on 1st January 1928, Babasaheb strolled over to the Chavdaar Tank with the president of the Mahaad Nagar Parishad, and found the words "Mahaad Municipality 1877" carved on a stone at the southwest corner of the tank. It was apparent that somebody had recently tried to scratch out the letters.[2]

The Chavdaar tank, which was not polluted by being used for the excretory functions of animals and birds, was considered polluted by the mere touch of the untouchables, and it was then 'cleansed' by putting in five sacred substances: milk, ghee, curds, and the urine and dung of cows. Cases were filed against the office-bearers of the conference. The news of the beating-up of the untouchables was variously reported in newspapers like *Kesari, Bahishkrut Bharat, Chabukswaar, Bhaala* etc., from which it became

clear who was for, and who against, the untouchables' cause. Babasaheb was successful in his objective of making the untouchables aware of their rights and engendering a sense of identity among them.

It was decided to undertake another satyagraha at Mahaad. Babasaheb's untouchable colleagues Gaikwad, Amrutrao Rankhambe, P.N. Rajbhoj, Shivtarkar and R.B.More, together with his caste Hindu supporters, Anantrao Chitre, Bhai Chitre, Surendra Tipnis, Bapu Sahasrabuddhe and others were with him. Thousands of untouchable persons assembled as decided in Mahaad on 25th and 26th December 1927. Women were present among them in large numbers. In response to the appeal by the district collector that the untouchables should not go to the Chavdaar Tank and touch the water while the case regarding whether the tank was public or private was being heard in court, some activists announced in their speeches that they were determined to undertake a satyagraha. A girl called Shantabai was among those who spoke. Her memories of the Mahaad satyagraha are recorded in an interview at the end of this book.[3]

"Unless the Chaturvarnya system is destroyed, there is no hope for Hinduism, because this system hampers the development of the individual. So allow this social revolution that we are bringing about to unfold peacefully, do not oppose us, reject the Shastras and embrace justice."This is how Babasaheb appealed to the caste Hindus in fraternal terms.

Several resolutions were placed before the assembly after Babasaheb's speech. Among them was a resolution to burn the *Manusmruti,* which holds women and Shudras in contempt and imposes immoral rules that amount to treating them as lower than animals. Gangadhar Sahasrabuddhe, P.N. Rajbhoj and others moved this resolution. After discussion, it was resolved that the *Manusmruti* be burnt. Another resolution stated that all human beings are equal from birth. An untouchable woman named Gangubai Savant supported this resolution.

The unethical rules regarding untouchables and women laid down in verses 1 to 11 of the *Manusmruti,* and the rights granted

to Brahmins in this text, show that the *Manusmruti* goes to great lengths to crush the shudras and women and to elevate the Brahmins. The restrictions Manu places on women and shudras are given at the end of this chapter.

The day after the burning of the *Manusmruti,* a huge procession of satyagrahis marched round the lake and back to the assembly hall. Fifty women took part in this procession together with men. Some women came in the afternoon to get a glimpse of Babasaheb. In the night Babasaheb made a speech before the women and this proved to be a revolutionary event in their lives. We have therefore given the full text of his speech:

Babasaheb said, "I am extremely happy that you have come to this meeting. Men and women together resolve the problems of everyday life. So must the problems of society be solved by men and women working together. If the men take up this work on their own, there is no doubt that they will take a long time to complete it. But if women take this work on themselves, I am sure they will soon succeed. Even if they are not able to take up this work (of social change) by themselves, they should take every chance to help those men who are doing it. I therefore tell you that from now on you must always be present in our meetings. To tell the truth, the task of removing untouchability belongs not to men, but to you women.

"You have given birth to us men. You know how other people consider us to be lower than animals. In some places even our shadow is not acceptable. Other people get respectable jobs in courts and offices, but the sons born of your wombs are held in such contempt that we cannot even get a job as a lowly peon in the police department. When you know all this, if someone asks you why you gave us birth, what answer will you give? What is the difference between us and the children born of the Kayastha and other caste Hindu women sitting in this meeting? You must think about this: there is as much virtue in you as in the Brahmin women. Just as much as Brahmin women are faithful to their husbands, so are you faithful. And Brahmin women do not have the mental courage, capability and spirit that you have. If this is the case, then

why should the children born of Brahmin women be treated with respect wherever they go, while your children face insults everywhere, why should they not even have the right to humane treatment? Have you ever thought about this? I feel that you have never thought about this. If you had thought about all this, you would have undertaken the satyagraha even before the men. Because the only sin we have committed is to have been born from your wombs, and because of this sin we have to bear the punishment of untouchability. So you must reflect on this: why is it a sin to be born of your wombs, while it is a virtue to be born to other women? If you think about this, either you will have to stop bearing children, or you will have to wash off this stigma. You must do one or other of these things. You must make a pledge that from now on you will not lead such a stigmatised existence. Just as the men have resolved to bring about progress in society, so must you.

The other thing I have to tell you is that you must all give up your old and disgusting customs. To tell the truth, no untouchable person carries the mark of being untouchable stamped on his forehead. But untouchable persons can be easily recognised as such because of their customs and way of life. I am of the opinion that these ways were once imposed on us by force. But such compulsion cannot continue under the rule of the British. Therefore you must now give up all those things that enable people to recognise you as being untouchable.

The way you wear your saris is a sign of your being untouchable, you must wipe out that sign. You must begin the practice of wearing your saris in the same fashion that upper-caste women do, it will not cost you anything. In the same way, your habit of wearing heavy necklaces round your necks and bracelets and bangles of *kathil* on your arms up to the elbow, mark you out as being untouchable. There is no need for more than one necklace. It is not as if your husband's lives will be lengthened or that you will look beautiful because of a neckful of ornaments. Clothes rather than ornaments make you look good. Rather than spending money on ornaments of silver or kathil, you should spend it on good clothes. If you

must wear ornaments, get gold ornaments made and wear them, or else you need not wear any. Also, you must take care to be clean in your person.

"You are the Laxmis in your homes, you must see to it that no untoward event takes place in your homes. It is a matter for rejoicing that, since last March, everyone has given up eating the flesh of dead animals. But if this has not happened in any single household, you must take on the responsibility yourselves. If anyone's husband brings home the meat of a dead animal, you must tell him, this will not be tolerated in my house. And I am sure that, if you make up your minds on this, this inauspicious custom will be completely ended. Also, you must make sure that your daughters are educated.

"Knowledge and learning are not for men alone, they are essential for women too. Our ancestors were aware of this. If they had not been aware, the people serving in the platoons would not have educated their girls as they did. They say, as is the quarry so will be the stone, so you must remember that if you want to improve the next generation, you must not neglect to educate your daughters. I am hopeful that you will not go away and forget this speech I have given you. You cannot afford to delay in putting it into practice. So, before you return to your homes tomorrow morning, change your style of wearing your saris, show me and then go. Only then will I believe that what I have said has made an impact."[4] After hearing this speech, Shrimati Vithabai promised on behalf of the women present that they would do as Babasaheb had asked.

This speech of Babasaheb Ambedkar proved to be unprecedented and unique and every sentence of this later became the basis for the work of untouchable women activists. This is borne out by our activist sisters in their interviews at the end of this book.

This speech had a remarkable effect on the women. The untouchable women (Mahaar, Chambhar) of the Konkan region, especially those from Thane and Colaba districts, used to wear their saris so that their knees and even their thighs were exposed

to view. This would make it possible for anyone to know their caste. After listening to Babasaheb's speech, the women who had come for the conference turned up the next day wearing their nine-yard saris around their ankles like Brahmin women. Mrs Chitre and Mrs. Tipnis helped them to do this. Babasaheb was moved to see their loyalty, and he gave them each eight annas to buy themselves blouses and bangles.[5]

On the next day, when the conference was over, Babasaheb went to see the Raigad fort. When he descended from the fort, the Mahaar and Chambhar women from the valley below the fort were standing to greet him with *artis*.[6]

Babasaheb's speech at the conference also had an impact on the men. They removed the rings and sticks from their ears and gave up eating the meat of carcasses. They stopped begging for morsels of food as part of their right of *watan*. Some even resigned from their jobs as sweepers in the municipality.

The court case against Babasaheb Ambedkar and four other satyagrahis dragged on for three to four years. In February 1928 the court gave its verdict and the ban order on the tank was lifted. The prosecution appealed to a higher court. When the higher court gave its verdict in favour of the untouchables on 8th June 1931 the caste Hindus went to the High Court. There the case went on for four more years and on 17th March 1937 the High Court turned down the appeal of the caste Hindus. Thus the untouchables had to fight in court for ten years to get the right to draw water from the tank. It was their victory in the end. The credit for this victory goes as much to the united strength and perseverance of the untouchable men and women as to Babasaheb's dynamic leadership.

In the Mahaad satyagraha, the untouchables became fully aware not only of their rights but also of their organisational strength. With the intention of using this strength to assert their right of entry to temples, they formed a satyagraha committee to enter the Parvati temple complex at Pune as Hindus, and on 13th October 1929 began a satyagraha there.

When the British put an end to the rule of the Peshwas, all the

property of the Peshwas passed over to the British. Even though the British had entrusted the management of the Parvati temple complex to the panch committee, the steps leading up the Parvati hill had been built at public cost, and the costs and management of the temple on Parvati hill had been handed over by the British to the government panch committee.

In 1842 the Collector of Pune province made a public declaration that, "In the divine establishment *(sansthaan)* at Parvati, Shri Devedeveshwar Mahadev etc., are gods of the establishment and their temples are separate. Within these temples the usual custom of declaring that if anyone but a caste Hindu enters, the place will be polluted, should not be practised."

Even though all this was perfectly clear, some people held that the Parvati temple and the surrounding temple complexes were the private property of the panch. The satyagraha committee asked in reply to this, how can temples being run at government cost be private? On 2nd October 1929 S.J. Kamble and P.N. Rajbhoj sent a notice to the panch of the Parvati establishment declaring that untouchables had the right to enter the Parvati temple, since these temples are public property and untouchables as Hindus should not be prevented from entering them. The notice demanded that the matter be cleared up within three days and that the untouchables should be allowed entry. But the panch turned down this demand, and the untouchables decided to undertake a satyagraha.

Accordingly, on Sunday, 13th October 1929 the satyagraha began. Untouchables from all over Maharashtra assembled at the foot of the Parvati hill. Processions and bhajan groups of untouchables joined in. Prominent leaders from all untouchable castes like Thorat (Mahaar), P.N. Rajbhoj (Chambhar), and Landge (Maang) came together for the satyagraha. Also, caste Hindu activists like Vinayakrao Bhuskute, Kakasaheb Gadgil, Keshavrao Jedhe, S.M. Joshi and others also took part. The participation of women was much larger than in the Mahaad satyagraha. Some women led groups of satyagrahis. Tanubai Kamble, wife of the activist Shivram Kamble, was the leader of one such group.

Seeing the untouchable satyagrahis assembled in huge numbers, their caste Hindu supporters and their insistence on entering the temple, the orthodox caste Hindus became furious.

On 13th October by 9 am the crowd of untouchable and caste Hindus on Parvati hill was growing. At the entrance doorway and other selected spots on the Nagarkhana temple, caste Hindus were seated ready to attack. The untouchable people, planning their satyagraha, formed orderly groups and began to climb the Parvati hill together with their bhajan and keertan groups.

Four such groups had the particpation and leadership of women. S.J. Kamble's wife and daughter were in the second of these four groups, while Mr. Kothalekar's mother was in the fourth group. (In *Bahishkrut Bharat* of 1929 and in Khairmode's biography of Ambedkar, the participation of women is mentioned in these terms. Specific names are not mentioned.)

As the satyagrahis, cheering, began to climb the steps, the waiting caste Hindus attacked them from all sides. Shouting, "Let these Mahaars just try and enter the temple", the orthodox Hindus began to jostle and push down the satyagrahis. Some of them used sticks, umbrellas, stones, bricks and even raw custard apples from trees around them to hit the satyagrahis. Those who were injured were dragged down on the ground. Rajbhoj, Bhuskute, Landge, Gadgil and others were badly hurt in the mêlée. Rajbhoj fell unconscious. Many satyagrahis were injured.

Thus the orthodox came down on the satyagrahis and prevented them from proceeding further. The injured persons and Rajbhoj, who had fainted, had to be taken to hospital. But it was resolved to continue the satyagraha even after this.

A meeting of the city Congress Committee was held in Pune under the chairmanship of V.R. Shinde. In Bombay, Babasaheb congratulated the satyagrahis and especially Rajbhoj. The outcastes in Madras gave their support and congratulations to the satyagrahis. The *Bhaala* newspaper remarked, "there is no objection to temple entry by persons of other faiths, in fact they are welcomed. So untouchables should be granted their religious rights." Other contemporary newspapers also made their supportive and

antagonistic comments.

In the end, the satyagraha was called off owing to the intervention of N.C.Kelkar, L.B.Bhopatkar, Jamnalal Bajaj and others. It was never resumed.[7]

As at the Ambadevi and Parvati temples, the untouchable people held one or two meetings on the issue of entry to the Kalaram temple in Nashik. Bhaurao Gaikwad, Amrutrao Rankhambe, Keshav Narayan Dev aka Patitpaavan Das, Shankardas Buwa, Sambhaji Rokade and some others established a committee, and sent a notice to the Kalaram Temple Trust informing them that "We untouchable people are going to enter the Ram Mandir and take darshan of Ram. If you or the caste Hindus oppose us, we will go on a satyagraha. Let us know what you have to say to this."

When no answer had been received from the Trust for five months, realising that it would be wrong to hope that an answer would come, the temple entry committee decided on 2nd March 1930 to enter the temple under the leadership of Babasaheb Ambedkar, and made an announcement to that effect.

About fifteen thousand satyagrahis had come to Nashik from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat. Devrao Naik, leader of the Samata Seva Sangh, D.V. Pradhan, Kavali, G.N. Sahasrabuddhe, Balasaheb Khare and Swami Anand had also come to Nashik. P.N. Rajbhoj, Sitaram Shivtarkar, Patitpaavan Das, Bhaurao Gaikwad, the Rankhambe brothers, Saavalaram Daani, Kale, Mestry and other untouchable leaders were looking after organisational matters with great enthusiasm.

The Nashik homes of Bhaurao Gaikwad and the Rankhambes, were being thronged by activists. Bhaurao's two wives, Seetabai and Geetabai, his sister-in-law Ramabai Kashinath Gaikwad and other women were working hard to take care of accommodation and meals for the activists.

On 2nd March 1930, in the open ground of the Mahaarwaada (Mahaar colony), about eight thousand men and women had gathered from Konkan, Vidarbha, and the districts surrounding Nashik. They included Chambhars and Maatangs as well as Mahaars. In the afternoon there were speeches by Babasaheb and others

including Patitpaavan Das, P.N.Rajbhoj, Naik Master and Pradhan.

At three in the afternoon a procession of sixteen thousand marching four abreast set out from the ground. About 500 women took part in this procession with great fervour. The marchers wore *khaadi* and even sported Gandhi caps.

The procession reached the Kalaram Mandir at five in the evening. But the caste Hindus had closed the doors of the temple. The procession was then led to the banks of the Godavari where a meeting was held with Sheth Tersi from Bombay presiding. From there the people returned to the Mahaarwaada. At 11 pm another meeting was held there with Babasaheb in the chair, and the names of those willing to sit down in protest at the temple entrance and to carry the struggle forward, were noted down. Thirty-five women were among those who gave their names. At 9am on 3rd March 1930 a meeting was held under Babasaheb's leadership and the volunteers were asked to remain peaceful and carry on the fight until the satyagraha was completely successful.

After this the satyagrahis held dharnas at all four entrances to the temple. The numbers of men and women among them were as follows: There were 35 men and 6 women at the north door,[8] 7 25 men and 10 women at the east door,[9] 8 20 men and 16 women at the south door,[10] 9 and 16 men and 7 women at the west door.[11] (Their names are given in a note at the end of this chapter.)

Once the satyagrahis had begun their dharna on all sides of the temple, they began to walk around the temple in continuation of their satyagraha. The women did not back down at this stage either; the numbers of women noted above participated till the end.

The caste Hindus were trying to drive off the satyagrahis who were conducting their peaceful protest around the temple by throwing stones at them. But they were not successful. The satyagrahis were insistent, and, in a compromise between untouchables and caste Hindus, it was agreed that the untouchables would be allowed to pull the chariot of the god Rama by a rope on the day of the Ramnavami festival on 9th March 1930. Soon the word spread that the Ramnavami chariot of Rama would be pulled by untouchable women.

Babasaheb had some sturdy gymnasium-trained men selected and ready to pull the chariot, but the caste Hindus, following a well-thought-out plan, ran away with the chariot at such speed that the untouchable people could not even touch it. As the untouchables ran after the chariot, the caste Hindus began to beat them with sticks, batons and stones. Babasaheb was also injured this time. The motorcar belonging to Bhaurao Gaikwad and Amrutrao Rankhambe was battered by stones, but the Rankhambes paid no heed and only appealed to the people to be peaceful.

From near the temple, Babasaheb and the satyagrahis next went to the Ramkund (the sacred pool of Ram). Caste Hindus were assembled on the Yashwantrao Maharaj ground on one bank of the river. There were caste Hindus on the other bank also. There was stone throwing from both sides. The satyagrahis bore the attack peacefully on that occasion.

Later the satyagrahis again sat in protest at the temple door. They kept making attempts to enter the temple. On 7th April 1930 hundreds of untouchables entered the temple. When the temple priest pushed back an untouchable girl she slapped him full in the face.[12]

While the satyagrahis were holding their dharna for temple entry, on 17th March 1930, 800 Sikh pilgrims arrived in Nashik to see the Kalaram Mandir. Seeing that the doors of the temple were closed they sent a notice to the temple priest several times through the police, but they learnt that the priest had gone out of town. This angered the Sikhs. The Sikh leader, Sardar Singh, their chairman Sardar Kisan Singh and their secretary organised a meeting of men and women near the temple. In this meeting the Sikhs told the satyagrahis that they should not be afraid and that they should continue their satyagraha until their demands were met, not even fearing death. One or two Sikh women also spoke at this meeting. These Sikh people gave Rs. 15 towards the satyagrahis' cause.[13]

In the meantime Babasaheb went to London, and the satyagraha lost some momentum. But in the month of September the satyagrahis brought renewed energy to their movement and started

walking round the temple in protest again. Around this time the opposition of the caste Hindus also increased. A campaign of committing violence against untouchables and boycotting them was started in the villages. This weakened the satyagraha for some time. It was built up again on 5th November 1931. The Round Table Conference was going on at the time, and the attention of untouchable activists was centred on that.

On 5th November people gathered for a procession in Nashik, after activists had worked in nearby villages like Vinchur, Patharde and Dugaon to prepare the people and work up enthusiasm among them, by holding meetings. The men and women from these villages marched at a distance of 100 yards from the temple.

On 31st December 1931 the untouchable satyagrahis began a movement to enter the Ramkund. A Maratha woman named Bhagubai was made to stand at the pool to oppose the untouchables. Backed by the caste Hindus, she abused the satyagrahis. On 31st December 1931 the period of the restrictive order passed under clause 144 expired and the untouchables began their circumambulatory protest again. When Damodar Narayan Mohite and Krushnaji Gopalrao Kawade, both untouchables, entered the temple by the priests' private door shouting slogans of "Victory", the caste Hindus beat them up and hurled a volley of stones at the satyagrahis. The caste Hindus trampled on the untouchables and Govind Jadhav, Ramji Jadhav, Anant Shirodkar, Nivrutti Jadhav and Bhima Waghmare were seriously injured.

Ramabai Jadhav together with some other women tried to break the police cordon around the temple. They were arrested and had to go to jail. The women went to jail with their small children. Three sisters, Ramabai, Seetabai and Geetabai Gaikwad took part in this satyagraha.

On this occasion there were 27 women among the 46 satyagrahis and they were prosecuted. They admitted to having committed satyagraha and the magistrate imposed a fine of Re. 1 to Rs. 2 on all the accused. When they refused to pay the fine, the court took out a warrant to collect the amount from them. Peace was established in Nashik. People were sent out to search for some

women and children who had got lost during the riot.

In this way the satyagraha at Nashik was interrupted at times but still went on. Meanwhile Babasaheb once again went to London and back, and after that, on 3rd March 1934 he wrote to Bhaurao Gaikwad from Bombay instructing that the satyagraha at Nashik be called off completely. Accordingly, it was suspended but not ended. However, on 13th October 1935 in Yeole, Babasaheb announced that the satyagraha had been finally ended before he declared his decision to convert to Buddhism.

Although the satyagraha ended the atrocities on untouchables and the social boycotts did not end. Untouchables could not buy things in shops. They had to face curses, beatings and obstructions. Dirt would be thrown in their drinking water and they would be prevented from cutting grass on the common lands. To fight against oppression of this kind the need for a Samata Sainik Dal (Egalitarian Fighting Force) was strongly felt. Later on a women's Samata Sainik Dal was also started.

Articles were published calling for a women's Samata Sainik Dal. One such article was written by Jangalgop in the *Janata* weekly of 13th April 1940.

Note 1

Restrictions Imposed on Shudras by the *Manusmruti*

1. If a Shudra offends a Brahmin or other upper-caste person by obscene words he should be killed.
2. If a Shudra is guilty of uttering a Brahmin's name together with obscene words, a red-hot nail ten fingers in length should be thrust into his mouth.
3. If a Shudra arrogantly curses, or advises a Brahmin about dharma, heated oil should be poured in his ears and mouth.
4. If a Shudra kicks an upper-caste person with his legs or hits him with his arms, the offending limb should be cut off.
5. If a Shudra raises a stick or an arm against a Brahmin or other upper-caste person, that arm should be cut off and if he kicks with his legs in anger, that leg should be cut off.
6. A Shudra who sits down on the same seat as a Brahmin should be branded on his waist and he should be exiled from the country, or else

his buttocks should be sliced off in such a way that he should die.

7. A Shudra rudely spitting in front of a Brahmin should have his lips cut off. If he urinates in front of a Brahmin his organ should be cut off, if he breaks wind his buttocks should be cut.

Note 2

Manu's remarks regarding Women:

1. Women's life characteristic is that they should attract men and corrupt them. For this reason wise persons are always vigilant when they are near them.
2. Because woman leads not only foolish men but even learned scholars onto the path of sin and make them the slaves of lust and anger.
3. One should not remain alone in the company of even one's mother, sister or daughter; because one's senses are strong and these women draw even learned pundits into their net.
4. Women do not look to a man's beauty or his age; for them it is enough that it is a man, then they will give themselves to him, whether he be handsome or ugly...
5. Women are so strongly attracted to men that, however strictly their husbands watch over them, they are so fickle and unfeeling by nature that they will fornicate with other men and betray their husbands.
6. When the Almighty created women he placed these destructive vices in them. Keeping this in mind, every man must be careful to protect himself from women.
7. Love of sleep, attraction to comfort and luxury, greed for jewels and unholy lusts, anger, slyness, envy and misbehaviour----all these vices exist in women.

These are Manu's religious laws; they demonstrate clearly how he held women in contempt. His other laws concerning women were of the same pattern. Manu was of the opinion that women should not be given autonomy under any circumstances.

(1) The men of the family should keep their women dependent on them night and day. If they discern any tendency to sexual indulgence in these women in the family, they should keep them always under under their control.

(2) In her childhood a woman is looked after by her father. In her youth her husband protects her and in old age she has the protection of her sons. A woman is never deserving of independence.

(3) If a woman shows the slightest inclination to follow the path of sin, she should be turned away from that path. Otherwise she will bring both her natal family and her husband's family to ruin.

(4) It is the highest duty of even the most pusillanimous husband to try and keep his wife under his control and protect her.

(5) No girl, young woman or old woman in the family has the right to act independently in family affairs.

(6) A woman must obey her father in childhood, her husband in youth, and her sons when she is old. She should never be independent.

(7) A woman should never dare to stay apart from her father, husband and son. If she leaves them and begins to live independently, she will draw the censure of society on both her families (her father's and her husband's).

(8) It is considered that a husband is one with his wife. This means that once a woman is married, she can never live apart from her husband.

(9) It was Manu's intention to bind the woman fast to her husband and to allow the man to behave as he pleases.

(10) A woman cannot be separated from her husband even if he sells her or abandons her.

(11) Manu's religious laws envisage death as a punishment for women.

(12) A woman has no right to gain knowledge. A woman should not utter the Vedic mantras. Manu has laid down the severest strictures so that it should be impossible for a woman to carry out sacred yadnya rituals. Thus Manu's objective in formulating these inhuman laws was to deprive women of the total freedom they had in the Buddhist era. Women's independence was anathema to him. That is why he destroyed it and condemned women to a slave-like existence.

(Ambedkar, Dr. B. R., *Hindu Striyanchi Unnati Aani Avanati* p. 28-32)

Endnotes

1 *Bahishkrut Bharat,* 30 November 1927.
2 Home Department File No. 355(64) , Confidential Weekly Diary of the D.S.P. Colaba.
3 The incident is recounted in the interview with Shantabai Bhalerao.
4 *Bahishkrut Bharat,* 3 February 1928.
5 *Bahishkrut Bharat,* Friday 3 February 1928.

6 Chitre, Anantrao: *Aathvaninchi Mohanmaal*, special issue, 1933.
7 *Dnyanprakash*, 21 January 1930.
8 (1)Yamunabai Kisanrao Lokhande, (2) Parvatibai Rongaji Lokhane, (3) Phandubai Dhanaji Daani, (4) Gangubai Bhikaji Pagare, (5) Devubai Shankarrao Lokhande, (6) Bhikubai Subhanrao Unhe.
9 (1) Thakubai Sakharam Salve, (2) Sarbai Nimbaji Bhalerao, (3) Draupadibai, (4) Kondubai Bhaurao More, (5)
10 (1) Pavalabi Sambhaji Kale, (2) Chimabai Gangaram Kale, (3)Kanhubai Sitaram More, (4) Rambhabai Rayaji Jadhav, (5) Sarubai S. Gaikwad, (6) Sakubai Dagadu Jadhav, (7)Bakubai G. Gaikwad, (8) Savalabai Sukaji Kadam, (9) Krushnabai Sitaram Dangle, (10) Saibai Dagaduji More, (11) Vithabai S. Gaikwad, (12) Ahilyabai B. Kardak, (13) Laxmibai Bala Pagare, (14) Salubai Dagadu Rode, (15) Pavalabai Revaji Kale.
11 (1) Sohjabai Narayanrao Jadhav, (2) Revubai Ganpatrao Gotarne, (3) Sundarabai Mahipat More, (4)
12 Phadke, Y.D., *Dr. Ambedkar Aani Kalaram Satyagraha*, p.18.
13 *Navaa Kaal:* 28 March 1930.

8

The Power of Organisation

In the beginning the women's role was confined to taking part in the movements started by men, attending meetings and helping the men in their work. Later on, the women began to raise questions occasionally on their own, and after this some special programmes for women were started.

As the untouchable women became educated and saw and heard what was going on around them, and as they became aware of social questions and identified with the Ambedkar movement, they began to work independently.

This awareness came to the women in Nagpur much earlier than to those in other parts of Maharashtra. There were many reasons for this. The proportion of untouchables in the population, according to the 1941 census, was 18 per cent in that region as compared to only 8 per cent in Bombay province. Social reforms were initiated even before 1900 in those parts, and a collective leadership began to emerge from the Mahaar community. Thus the movement rapidly spread all over the region. The government of the Central Provinces had also given the untouchable more facilities for education.

The geographical region of Nagpur was at the time relatively more prosperous than other parts of Maharashtra. Because cotton, oranges, wood and lacquer were produced in the region, there

was a large amount of industrial activity, with textile mills, fruit markets, godowns for storing wood and lacquer, beedi factories etc. In these industries, untouchables worked as small contractors and labourers, especially where hard manual labour was required. Also untouchables formed a large proportion of recruits in the British army. Thus the economic condition of the untouchables in this (Vidarbha) region was better than elsewhere. As a rule, when any society progresses in this way the women also progress along with the men.

Compared to Vidarbha, the restrictions of caste were much more severe in the Pune region under the Peshwas. Just as the Maratha rajas and sardars enlisted Mahaars in their armies, so did the Bhosles of Vidarbha recruit Mahaar soldiers. Since parts of Vidarbha were under the rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad, the restrictions of the caste system were less severe in a Muslim regime. Also, since the Mahaars were not negligible in number, they were in a better position to fight social injustice.

The women were taking part in the movements with the men, helping them in their work. Later on they became conscious of the need to build their own autonomous organisations.

In January 1928 a Mahila Mandal[1] (women's association) was established in Bombay and it was decided that this association would organise a women's conference on 29th January. It was planned to have Mrs. Ramabai Ambedkar to preside. In the pamphlet issued by the Welcome Committee it was stated that this conference would be held at Damodar Hall in Parel, Bombay, and that its objective was to bring about reforms in our (untouchable) society, to help the struggles of the men and to generate exalted aims in the minds of the women.

Clearly this conference was organised on the advice of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, since the women in this association were the wives of Babasaheb' s close associates Shivtarkar and Jadhav. We see that Babasaheb made conscious attempts to draw women into the social and political movement; for instance, Shrimati Savitribai Borade and Shrimati Ambubai Gaikwad were included

among the 16 members of the 1932-33 executive committee of the *Janata* newspaper.[2]

Women began to take part with enthusiasm in meetings and conferences organised by the men. With the participation of women in large numbers in conferences, separate sessions were being organised for the women, in which they began to express their views in an honest and forthright manner.

The first session of the all-India Depressed Classes Congress was held at Nagpur on 8th to 10th August 1930, presided over by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. In this conference a separate women's session was held on the 10th.[3] The women gave speeches supporting the stand taken by Ambedkar in the Round Table Conference.

In the assembly held in Kamathi in 1932 after Babasaheb returned from the Round Table Conference, 200 women were present.[4] Mrs. Shewantabai Ogale and Anjanibai Deshbhratar spoke in support of Dr. Ambedkar's position and of the Minorities Pact. At this conference, Miss Virendrabai Teerthankar was elected provincial women's organiser and secretary.

Following soon after the Kamathi conference, the women organised their own independent conference. In this conference, held under the presidency of Subhadrabai Ramteke, the policy of the Congress Party and the Hindu Mahasabha was strongly deplored. The women declared their opposition to Harijan leaders like G.A. Gavai who had betrayed the movement from within to go along with the Congress, and declared their support for Ambedkar's contribution to the struggle.[5]

In 1936, Anusayabai Ingole presided over the C.P.(Berar) Untouchable Women's Provincial Congress.[6] The resolutions passed at this conference testify to the growing awareness of women in the social and political spheres. They were as follows:

1. Of the three women's seats in the Provincial Legislative Councils, one seat should be reserved for a woman from the untouchable community.
2. The state government should appoint untouchable women as honorary magistrates.

3. The wages of women working in the textile mills should not be cut.
4. The Provincial Government should make education in state schools free and compulsory for untouchable girls. They should be given scholarships and hostels should be established for them.
5. Untouchable women teachers should be appointed in the state schools.
6. It should be made the custom that girls should not be married until their schooling is complete and that they should be given physical education.
7. Every boy up to the age of 10 years should be given a 5-inch long *jambiya* (dagger) to place in his waistband and every girl should be given a three-inch-long trident to tuck into her hair. This should be made mandatony practice.

In the dalit community of the time, outdoor and masculine sports like *aakhaadaa* (pit wrestling), wrestling, stick-wielding, *daandpatta, hututu* (kabaddi) were popular everywhere. Thus several wrestlers were prepared for defence against atrocities and attacks. Classes to teach women to wield sticks were started in all the untouchable colonies in the Nagpur region. The recognition in the above resolutions of the need for including physical exercise in the educational curriculum for girls is an indication of the progressive vision of dalit women.

It was around this time that the Nagpur District Women's Conference was held, with Bhagiratibai Thorat in the chair.[7] About a thousand men and women were present. Resolutions were passed backing Ambedkar's call for conversion (his declaration at Yeole in 1935 that though he had been born a Hindu, he would not die a Hindu), expressing concern for the schooling and physical education of girls and calling for government aid to untouchables' educational institutions. Similar resolutions were passed in the Women's Conference held in Malkapur on 28th March 1934.[8]

With a view to improving women's situation, a women's Association was established on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti in Nagpur.[9]

Women were working to raise people's awareness by making speeches at meetings and conferences, passing resolutions and so on. Women leaders made speeches of this type at the Ambedkar birthday celebrations in Imamwada on 26th April 1937.[10]

Another similar meeting was held with Mrs Gangubai Banduji Gangurde in the chair, in Manmad, district Jalgaon, on 15th April 1936. On this occasion Mrs. Gangurde analysed in detail the inequality inherent in the Hindu religion. A girl called Chandrika Jamdhade sang songs composed in honour of Babasaheb.[11]

A meeting of untouchable women was held in Dharampeth, Nagpur on 1st January 1938. Earlier, in the session of the All India Women's conference held in December, Hindu women like Jaibai Choudhuri had insulted the dalit women by arranging separate seating for them at meals. Anjanibai Deshbhratar and Sakhubai Meshram condemned the "shameful and despicable behaviour" of the Hindu women and advised the women to be self-respecting and self-reliant. Also in this meeting, the Ramabai Ambedkar Women's Sangh was founded.[12] It was announced that this association would start a night school for women.

After this, the Umred Taluka Women's conference was held on 20th April 1940, with Sulochanabai Dongare in the chair.[13] It was resolved that there should be reserved seats for untouchable women in the provincial assemblies and that untouchable women should start branches of the Samata Sainik Dal throughout the taluka.

The Samata Sainik Dal had been established at the time of the Mahaad Satyagraha. At first it was called the Dr. Ambedkar Seva Dal. At a meeting held in the Damodar Hall on 2nd April 1931with Dr. Ambedkar in the chair, the name was changed to "Samaaj Samata Dal".[14] Later on it came to be known as the Samata Sainik Dal.

Besides the above, separate women's sessions were being organised all over Maharashtra by the Independent Labour Party.[15]

Endnotes

1 Handwritten pamphlet: The general secretaries of this Mandal were Mrs. Venubai Sitaram Shivtarkar and Mrs. Janakibai Nivrutti Jadhav.
2 *Janata* special issue, 1993.
3 Kosare, D. L., p.149: Chairperson: Mrs. Gunabai Gadekar, Chairperson of the welcome committee-Mrs. Shewantabai Ogale, secretary Mrs. Tulsabai Bansode Patil, also office bearers Jaibai Chaudhuri and Kashibai Mandavdhare.
4 *Dnyaanprakash*, 10th April 1932.
5 *Janata*, 5th May 1934.
6 *Nirbhid*, 8th March 1936.
7 *Janata*, 28th March 1936 : in this assembly Mrs. Shivrabai Patil, Shantabai Rangari, Sakhubai Meshram, Miss Muktabai Narayane, Saraswatibai Khobragade made speeches.
8 *Janata*, 21st April 1934. The following women made speeches: Mrs. Kirtibai Ingle, Rahibai, Kesarbai Wakode, Kashibai Bhagat, Radhabai Tayade, Sakhubai Tayade, Bhikabai Wagh, Chindhabai .
9 *Janata*, 17th May 1937: The following women were active in this association: chairperson-Miss Virendrabai Teerthankar, vice-chairperson–Anjanibai Deshbhratar, general secretary - Radhabai Kamble, honorary secretary - Shardabai Tembhurne, assistant secretary - Vimalabai Somkunwar, Treasurer - Miss Annapurna Moon (Mrs. Keertibai Patil). Representatives - Banabai Dhengre, Chandrabai Ramteke, Sakhubai Meshram, Sayatrabai Phulzele, Bhagirathibai Thorat, Parvatibai Sontakke etc.
10 The following women made speeches in birthday celebrations at Imamwada: Radhabai Kamble, Sakhubai Meshram, Anjanibai Deshbhratar, Miss Satyabhama Patil, Miss Walambibai Totade.
11 *Janata*, 9th May 1936
12 *Janata*, 22nd January 1938: chairperson - Mrs. Shardabai Taagadi, deputy chairperson-Nagobai Suryawanshi, secretary-Mrs. Sakhubai Meshram, assistant secretary - Saangunabai Laamdhare, and other women members were present.
13 *Janata*, 29th June 1940.
14 *Dnyaanprakash*, 26th June 1931.
15 *Janata*, 16th April 1940 : Nagpur-Anjanibai Deshbhratar was present. 21st May 1940 , Bhankheda, Nagpur - chairperson Indirabai Patil. 13th January 1939 : Ghoraad, District Wardha.

9

Consciousness of Political Rights

Nagpur: Women's Conference of the Scheduled Castes Federation, 1942. Before India was granted independence, a committee of representatives headed by Sir Stafford Cripps toured the country to meet the leaders of various political parties. On 30th March 1942 the Cripps committee held talks with Ambedkar. In that meeting Ambedkar clearly stated that, if any constitution were to be imposed on the untouchables without their consent, this would be considered a betrayal. In the same meeting, Cripps asked Ambedkar whether he was representing untouchables or labourers.

This question led Babasaheb to think that the untouchables should have an independent political organisation of their own. And he at once decided to establish the Scheduled Castes Federation.

Accordingly an All-India Congress of Depressed Classes was organised at Mohan Park in Nagpur on 18th, 19th and 20th July, 1942. Since large numbers of women were going to be present, so it was decided to hold an independent women's conference. In preparation for this, elections of the All-India Dalit Women's Conference, Nagpur, were held on 4th July 1942 in the office of the Independent Labour Party. Office-bearers were elected and a welcome committee was formed.[1]

The untouchable community came together in large numbers in Nagpur for the All-India Congress of Depressed Classes. Dr. Ambedkar was going to preside, but since he was taken into the Viceroy's council of ministers at this time, B.N. Shivraj was given the chairman's post.

The All-India Dalit Mahila Parishad was held on 20th July 1942. Women representatives had come not only from the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions, but from all over India. In all, 25,000 women attended the conference.[2]

The conference was presided over by Sulochanabai Dongre, the Chairperson of the Welcome Committee was Keertibai Patil, and the General Secretary was Indirabai Patil. Babasaheb Ambedkar made it a point to be present. A number of spontaneous speeches were made.

The Dalit Mahila Federation of 1942

The chairperson of the Welcome Committee, Mrs. Keertibai Dongre, said in her speech: "I thank you and welcome all of you for having come here from different parts of the country, even though this is wartime. When our men folk are fighting for our rights we should not remain behind. Even if we are still far from the path chalked out for us by our leader Dr. Ambedkar, those of our sisters who can lead the way should now be ready to do this work.

"Although women have to do the housework, they should not get tied up in it. Like the men, we too are eager for independence, in fact that is our right and we should struggle to the utmost and make efforts to gain it. Those who are burned by suffering need independence. It is the duty of all of us to help our men in fighting for our rights.

"In these Central Provinces, the proportion of educated women is very small. It is our duty to instil an urge for schooling among them. At the same time, we must be prepared, with the help of our ignorant sisters, to fight for the rights of untouchables under the guidance of our leader Babasaheb Ambedkar, and even to sacrifice our lives if need be.

"In the Chavdar Tank and the Kalaram Temple satyagrahas, women from far-off provinces like Hyderabad took part. The activities of Geetabai Gaikwad are beyond description. Let us be inspired by her; let us follow her path in order to gain our rights.

"To end our backwardness we must work in an organised struggle, and for this a central organisation with branches in all provinces is essential."

After this the General Secretary, Mrs. Indirabai Patil, said in her speech, "We women are far behind the men in education. If we do not go with the men and help them in their activities, we will become a hindrance in their progress. So we must fight for women's education.

"The world is changing fast. If we are to survive, we too must change with it. We have a twofold responsibility: to help the men and also to reform the women in education and other matters. Since the Hindu religion has corrupted our minds, we think that our duty is only to bow down before our husbands and look after the kitchen and the children. To remove these Hindu religious thoughts of slavery from the minds of our sisters is the huge task before us."

After these two speeches, Jaibai Choudhuri proposed the name of Sulochanabai Dongre for the post of president of the Parishad. Radhabai Kamble seconded the proposal. After this, the new and old members together elected the president.

In her presidential address Sulochanabai Dongre said, "Earlier we had no leader, but now we are fortunate to have Dr. Ambedkar as our leader. He is willing to move heaven and earth to destroy the monster of untouchability. It is our duty to help him in this difficult task.

"In the matter of education we are still very backward. The girl of today is the mother of tomorrow. She who rocks the cradle liberates the world. So it is important to educate the girls. The girls must know how to bring up children. If there is no education, one's virtues and talents cannot be developed. In matters of religion we must try and go beyond Hinduism.

"Our women must be represented in every district and tehsil local board. Among the 20 legislative representatives many are uneducated men. If some of these seats had been given to our educated women, our situation could have been improved."

After this she described the conditions of the illiterate women and women workers, and gave suggestions on several issues: that women, in certain situations, should have the right of divorce; that polygamy should be outlawed; that dalit women should accept family planning (contraception); that women's hostels should be started all over for untouchable women, etc.

After this some important resolutions were passed. It is clear from the resolutions passed at this Conference how progressive the views of Babasaheb Ambedkar and his women followers were. This conference made the far-sighted demand that the government should enact a law granting the right of divorce to husbands and wives and put a legal ban on polygamy. A resolution to the effect that workers and working women should get 21 days' casual leave, one month's privilege leave, and compensation in case of injury, and that a pension of at least Rs. 15 per month should be paid after 20 years of service, was sent to the Viceroy through the Minister of Labour. Later Ambedkar legally implemented these demands when he became Labour Minister. Another resolution demanded that only women should be appointed as supervisors over women workers in the mills. Other resolutions passed in this Women's Conference were that in order to promote women's education, the provincial governments should build 100 women's hostels at district places, at state expense, that untouchable girls students should be given scholarships for secondary and higher secondary schooling, and that primary education should be made compulsory.[3]

The novel content of the resolutions passed by the women, and their presence in such large numbers, made Babasaheb extremely happy. He was also happy to see these educated, committed, and conscious women expressing their views lucidly and confidently at the meeting. On this occasion Babasaheb made a speech praising all the women present and encouraging them.[4]

He said, "I am aware that if the women become conscious they can bring about very great progress in untouchable society. I believe that there should be an organised association of women. They have a great duty in removing the vices of society; I can say this from my experience. When I took up activity for untouchable society, I resolved that the women must be led forward as well as the men. That is why women's conferences are held alongside our conferences. I measure the progress made by untouchable society by seeing how much progress our women have made. Seeing the presence of women in huge numbers at this conference, I am certain and also I am happy that we have made progress...

"Learn to live in cleanliness, stay away from all bad habits and vices. Give education to your children; create a sense of ambition in them. Instil in their minds the feeling that they will become great. Do not press them to marry until they have attained the capacity to bear the responsibility that comes with marriage. Those who marry should remember that it is wrong to produce many children. Even if no facilities are available to you, mothers and fathers have a responsibility to keep their children in a good condition. Every girl who marries must be ready to stand by her husband's party. Not as his slave but in a relation of equality, as his friend. If you behave according to this advice you will lift up not only yourselves but dalit society as well, and increase respect for yourselves and for the community."

Babasaheb was not content with speaking thus about the women's presence at the conference and their progress. In a letter dated 3rd August 1942 to G.T.Meshram, chairman of the Welcome Committee of the All-India Depressed Classes Conference, he makes the following remarks about the Dalit Mahila Parishad:[5] "It was the women's conference that made a great impression on me. I am biased towards the women and I would like them to participate more and more in social activity. The presence of women in thousands at the conference was such a wonderful sight that the gods themselves would want to see it. My heart was especially gladdened to see their dress, their neatness, and the confidence with which they carried themselves at the conference."

Babasaheb's delighted remarks were justified. The women of the executive committee present at the conference were all very capable and they had been engaged in social activity for several years. These women were conscious that their community must move forward on the path of progress; that they must make a place for themselves in the educational, social, economic and political spheres. Besides showing their eagerness to work under Babasaheb's leadership, the women had individually acquired a sense of self-respect and self-confidence.

In 1942, the movement of dalit women acquired a tremendous vigour and independent meetings of dalit women began to take place all over Maharashtra. After the Workers' and Peasants' Federation was formed in 1942, a meeting of the Federation was held in Nagpur. Shantabai Dani was elected President of the party's Nasik district branch.[6]

After this, other conferences of the Peasants' and Workers' Federation were held on a large scale every year. The Congress Party was in power and so there was no lack of funds to hold conferences. But it was the poor who collected funds paisa by paisa so that the conferences of the Dalit Federation could be held. People would tie up their *bhakris* and walk miles to be present at the conferences so that they could hear Babasaheb's speeches. The second conference of the Dalit Federation was held in Kanpur in 1944. Here too, a separate women's conference was held and resolutions passed as in Nagpur.

The third conference of the All India Untouchable Women's Federation was organised in Bombay on 6th May 1945.[7] This conference, which demonstrated an increased ideological awareness among women, was held successfully in a *mandap* specially made for the occasion. In the chair was Mrs. Meenambal Shivraj, wife of B.N. Shivraj, president of the All India Dalit Federation, and herself a leading social activist of the Madras Province.

Women representatives had come from several provinces of India. About ten thousand women took part in the conference.

The conference began with songs sung by Miss Shivraj from Madras (daughter of N. Shivraj), Mrs. Rajmani from Hyderabad, Mrs Jadhav from Nagpur, Miss Godavari Rokade from Bombay and others. The reformist song sung in a robust but melodious voice by Mrs. Jadhav from Nagpur had the audiences swaying in response. At exactly five o'clock Mrs. Shivraj arrived and the conference began.

Shantabai Dani, president of the Nashik district branch of the Federation, introduced Mrs. Meenambal Shivraj and requested her to take the chair. Mrs. Kureel, representative from the United Provinces, seconded the proposal. Mrs. Sarojini Jadhav, president of the Samata Mandal, in her presidential address expressed her satisfaction at the progress made by the women, and criticised the traders and moneylenders of the Congress Party who exploited the untouchables and the untouchable women. All the speakers on this occasion pointed out how the work taken up by the All India Women's Federation established by the caste Hindu women was essentially hollow. "This organisation will not do us any good; to bring about our welfare we must have a separate organisation of untouchable women. The Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League could not show us the true path to independence; it is Babasaheb Ambedkar who showed us the way. The untouchables, the poor, need political, economic and social independence. The untouchable woman is totally dependent in all these spheres. If she is to gain independence a movement of untouchable women must come up." Several speeches were made in this vein.

After this, Mrs. Shantabai Wadwalkar, General Secretary of the Untouchable Women's Parishad, presented a report of the activities of the Parishad.

At this point Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar arrived. As he entered the mandap there was tremendous applause. The women gave Babasaheb an unprecedented welcome. After he was seated, Mrs. Meenambal Shivraj began her presidential speech.

She began by expressing her regret at not being able to accept the chair at the Nagpur conference, and her happiness at being

present at this conference. After this she spoke about the well-known Tamil poetess Avvayaar, who was the first to attack the Varna system, and explained how she had expounded on the principle of equality between men and women in her poetry. She spoke about how Hinduism imposes the foolishness of the Varna system even on animals and birds, and analysed the practice of untouchability in Tamil Nadu (then the Madras Presidency).

Women of the untouchable community traditionally have the right to divorce and of widow remarriage; but their situation is worsened by the fact that Hindu laws are imposed on them. Therefore, explained Meenambal Shivraj, Hindu customs and Hindu laws should not be applied to us. Later she said, "Tailoring should be made available to us women as a means of earning our living. Our women should participate in social activity, develop themselves, take up different courses, learn skills, the illiterate should become literate, and they should bring up their children well, not indulge them unnecessarily. In some places our women wear a burkha; this practice should end. Throw off the veil and learn self-confidence. All women should join the All India Scheduled Castes Federation and aim to bring our community into the governing class."

Rao Bahadur, N. Shivraj and Professor Pyarelal Kureel also made speeches at this conference. After this, various resolutions were passed.[8] Speaking on the resolutions, Mrs. Mukta Sarvagaud said, "Our progress, the status of our society are entirely dependent on politics and if we are to grasp the political solution to our problems, we have need of scholarship. So we must first become educated. We will find the energy, effort and funds needed for education on our own. We will not be obliged to anybody. Gandhiji has proposed a plan for a Kasturba Fund; do not accept it. We have won some facilities through Babasaheb's untiring efforts; you should make use of them. Only when women become literate will the society benefit. The future generations must be given the right guidance. The mother is the teacher of her children but men and women are equal. Both have an equal responsibility; if you act in consciousness of this you will be successful."

After the women had made stirring and learned speeches, and all the resolutions had been unanimously passed, the Parishad was successfully concluded amid clamorous applause and ringing tributes to Babasaheb.

The All India Untouchable Women's Conference in Bombay supported and strengthened the resolutions of the Nagpur Conference of 1942. The major demands made by the conference were that government hostels be established for untouchable girls, and industries be set up by the state to provide employment to destitute untouchable women. One resolution also asked that women members be nominated to the executive committees of the Dalit Federation in branches at the tehsil, district and provincial levels. This implies that women were not at the time adequately represented at the taluka and district levels. The resolutions regarding women workers adopted in the Nagpur conference were not repeated in Bombay, because Ambedkar as Law Minister had resolved the question of workers' rights.

In the conferences of the Peasants' and Workers' Federation the women began to demand not only that women participate in politics, but also that a women's military squadron be raised. A resolution was therefore passed in the Peasant and Workers' Women's Parishad held in the village Kurdi near Bhandara. It was also resolved that those innocent untouchable youths who had been falsely and vindictively implicated in riots cases should be freed and that the women should stand firmly behind them. Barubai Bamburde was the Secretary of this women's federation.[9]

After the establishment of the Peasants' and Workers' Federation in 1942, the women increasingly became politically conscious on a wide scale. The transformation taking place among the uneducated women was particularly remarkable. The Scheduled Castes Federation gave the women its full cooperation, and women supported all the activities of the Federation. The women also started numerous mandals and associations. "We women no longer have any reason to be afraid of men's authority, or to live under a feeling of social dread. We must recognise our own strength and

virtue and move forward." Declarations like these were being made by the women in all their speeches.

The Satyagraha against the Poona Pact, 1946

According to the Poona Pact agreed on by Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi in 1932, the untouchable representatives were not to be chosen by separate untouchable electorates but it was the caste Hindu voters who were also to elect the untouchable representatives. As a result of this, the true representatives of the untouchable would not get elected; those who were elected would be puppets of the caste Hindus.

The behaviour of Hindu society was not as Gandhiji had promised Ambedkar at the time of the Poona Pact. Therefore it was decided that the Peasants' and Workers' Federation would undertake a Satyagraha in front of the All India Legislative Council to repudiate the Poona Pact and demand separate electorates for the untouchables.

Accordingly, in 1946, a number of satyagrahas took place in front of the Legislative Assemblies at Pune in the Bombay Presidency, at Nagpur in the Central Provinces (Berar), and at Kanpur in the United Provinces. Thousands of men and women took part, courted arrest and went to jail.

Among the satyagrahis in Pune were Seetabai and Geetabai Gaikwad from Nashik. Kashinath, brother of Bhourau Gaikwad was also a satyagrahi. On this occasion the Gandhians beat up Kashinath Gaikwad mistaking him for Bhourao, and his ear was torn. He went to jail in that condition. The women went to prison with their babies and small children; Radhabai, wife of Babasaheb's friend Balwantrao Warale was among them. All the satyagrahis, even the small children, were shouting slogans loudly.

Warale's one-and-a-half-year-old daughter was also shouting slogans in her childish tongue. When they said, "*Chalo Pukaro* Jaibheem" (Come, call out Jaibheem) she would say, "*chalo kaparo*" and so on.[10] Everyone was moved to hear the little girl.

From Thane, Manoramabai Tulsiram Dhotre, Kashibai Jaitapkar and other women had attended the satyagraha. Manoramabai

Dhotre, the wife of Tulshiram Dhotre, a dedicated Ambedkarite activist was from Natunagar village in the Khed block of Colaba district, she went to prison for 15 days.

The satyagrahis were not treated well in prison. The food was not adequate, and the children would cry from hunger. Manoramabai recalls that the women would give the children their share of the rations and go hungry themselves.

The Pune satyagrahis were arrested and taken before the court. When the judge saw that Warale's wife was in prison with her small child, he remarked, "Bai, this child of yours is very small. All of you will suffer in prison. So you should plead guilty, ask for pardon and go home." But Mrs. Warale replied, "When we left home, we did so after full consideration. Now there is no going back. I am guilty; give me the punishment."

A correspondent of the *Janata* weekly covering the satyagraha asked some questions of Mrs. Warale as a representative of the satyagrahi women, and she gave very pointed replies:[11]

Reporter: Bai, why did you go to prison?

Waralebai: What, are you not an untouchable? Then do you not know what the satyagraha is for? You should be ashamed to call yourself an untouchable. Don't you care about your community? This satyagraha has been started with the object of gaining our political rights, following Babasaheb's command. We are going to prison under the banner of the Peasants' and Workers' Federation.

Reporter: What do you mean by rights?

Waralebai: That we should enter the temples which the Hindus enter, that we should be free to draw water where they draw water, these we call our social rights. And to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Viceroy and pull the cart of political affairs, that is our political right.

Reporter: (says to himself: I did not expect to hear such a simple and straightforward definition of the term 'political rights' from this uneducated woman.) If you had been given a very harsh sentence, if you had had to pay a heavy fine, would you have asked for pardon and come back from the prison?

Waralebai: Look, when we came here without caring for house and home, was it so that we should turn back because of a fine or from fear? While our demands are not met we will carry on our satyagraha until all the prisons of Hindustan are full.

Reporter: But if you break the law like this and disturb the work of the Congress the police will have to fire on you.

Waralebai: Look, does a fighter on the battlefield care about death? Whatever happens we women will be in the forefront. It is better to die than to live a slavish, shameful life. We will sacrifice our lives, but we will get our rights.

The women satyagrahis in Nagpur were as sharply conscious as those in Pune. In Nagpur a satyagraha conducted by the Peasants 'And Workers' Federation commenced at the C.P.(Berar) Assembly Hall on 3rd September 1946 at 12 noon. One hundred men and 14 women took part in the first detachment. The satyagrahis carried placards with the slogans, 'End the British Ministry Plan, end Congress Rule, Abolish the Poona Pact, We Shall Have Separate electorates'. Among the women who were arrested were the wife of Sambhaji Khandare and Mrs. Dongre. On the second day, there were 186 men and 17 women among the 203 satyagrahis. Of them, Mrs. Khushalrao from Akola courted arrest. On 5th September 1946 there were 258 satyagrahis including 19 women. Mrs. Khobragade and Mrs. Tayade from Akola played a leading role. On the fourth day, on 6th September, there were 247 satyagrahis of whom 47 were women. Radhabai Kamble was leading the women satyagrahis. Fines of Rs.25 to Rs.200 were slapped on these satyagrahis,[12] but the women did not budge.

Another satyagraha was begun at Kanpur on 25th March 1946. Hundreds of satyagrahis from Agra, Aligarh and Kanpur gathered in front of the U.P.Assembly building in Kanpur. The police mounted a lathi-charge on the satyagrahis, in which the untouchable activist Kesarlal and his daughter were badly hurt. Seventeen women from Agra took part in this satyagraha. Three hundred satyagrahis led by Jodhram came from Nagpur; there were 70 women among them. In a satyagraha that lasted 27 days

1387 satyagrahis in all were arrested; one-third of them were women.[13]

Thus we see that a large number of women took a radical and determined stand in these satyagrahas. The women who played such a role were later publicly felicitated.

On 11th August 1946, a meeting was organised by the Bombay branch (women's wing) of the Peasants' and Workers' Federation in the B.D.D. Chawl No.15 to felicitate and congratulate the women who had taken part in the Pune satyagraha and spent time in prison. A large crowd of women was present at the meeting. Several women made speeches on the subject of 'The Struggle of the Untouchable Community and the role of the Untouchable Woman'. Notably, all the six women who had been to prison made thoughtful speeches and recounted their experiences in prison. At the end of her speech, each made the same declaration: "We will now be in the forefront of any struggle led by Dr. Babasaheb under the banner of our Peasants' and Workers' Federation. We are eager to carry out successfully any responsibility entrusted to us."[14]

A function was held under the chairmanship of Anna Buwaji Kamble to felicitate the satyagrahi firebrand Mrs. Yashodabai Mohite, of Satara, on her return home after taking part in the Pune satyagraha and serving time in prison. An audience of 200 to 300 persons was present. Bhagubai Kamble, representing the women in the meeting, garlanded Yashodbai, who spoke about her time in prison and declared, "It is our duty to participate wholeheartedly in the satyagrahas organised in our movement. Only by believing in the words of Dr. Babasaheb will the dalits be liberated. So we must be ready to respond to his call."[15]

Dalit women showed a similar fire in various places, taking part in the movement under the PWF banner. In all these events we can see their political awakening and increasing political awareness.

In the meeting organised by the Dalit Mahila Sangh at Kinjilal Peth, Babhulkheda, Nagpur, it was decided that the women should follow the instructions of the PWF and work side by side with the

men.[16] Communicating a similar message, Mrs. Bhimabai Chavan, in the chair at a haldi kunku ceremony held by the Dalit Mahila Mandal in Pune, said," Women are still backward in this world. Therefore women must awaken. Do not spend your spare time in empty pursuits. You must spread education and knowledge of the science of bringing up children, and make people aware of the importance of Babasaheb's work."[17] Speeches of a similar kind were also made at the public inaugural function of an association called the Ramabai Vanita Samaj (Ramabai Women's Society) in Solapur.[18]

On 2nd April 1948 a meeting was held at Siddharth College in Bombay with Devikabai Damodar Kamble in the chair. Women from every area of Bombay were present in large numbers. The main emphasis was on the organisation of women. Resolutions were passed to the effect that Mahila Mandals be established everywhere, that all women should contribute at least four annas as monthly subscription, and give one rupee for the students' ashram to be built in the name of Ramabai Ambedkar. This showed the women's consciousness about children's schooling. A committee of women was also formed in this meeting.[19]

A concern for education was also the motivating force behind the welcome function, presided over by Mrs. Sarojini D. Jadhav, which was organised by the devi Ramabai Ambedkar Students' Ashram Building Fund on the grounds of St. Xavier's College on 12th October 1948. On this occasion Sakhubai Mohite made a fluent and spontaneous speech. Also, Mrs. Savita Ambedkar expressed regret that she could not see any person capable of carrying on work with Babasaheb's commitment. She also said that women should at least become literate.[20]

As with the women, organisations of untouchable students were also coming up. In Nagpur a District Untouchables' Conference was held in 1949.[21]

Endnotes

1 Report of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation, Nagpur, 1942 The following women were office-bearers : Chairperson - Mrs. Keertibai Patil, deputy chairperson - Miss Latikabai Gajbhiye, Mrs. Radhabai Kamble, general secretary - Mrs. Indirabai Patil, joint secretary - Miss Kausalya Nandeshwar, Radhabai Kamble, Miss Manjula Kaanphaade, members - Miss Radhabai Baageshwar, Miss Prabhavati Ramteke, Mrs. Jaibai Chaudhuri, treasurer - Mrs. Dlambabai Haadke.
The following members were present: Anjanibai Deshbhratar, Parvati Navanaage, Kamal Dive, Savitribai Patil, Mahaagabai Patil, Ramabai Khobragade, Radhabai Baageshwar, Yashoda Vahaane, Virendraabnai Teerthankar, Manaabai Modak, Anusuyabai Shende, Draupadibai Sakharkar, Vijayabai Saakhare, Keekabai Indurikar, Saarja Meshram, Sulabha Meshram, Shanta Laade, Kalaa Naarnavare, Bhima Baagade, Chandrabhaaga Patil, Gaya Shende, Sulochana Naik.
2 Ibid.
3 *Mahrashtra* (Nagpur), 2nd August 1942.
4 Kosare, p.418-19 ;
5 Kosare, p.478.
6 Waraale, p.132-33.
7 *Janata*, 16th May 1945.
8 *Janata*, 16th May 1945: Shantabai Daani, Menambai Shivraj, Dr.(Miss) Londhe, Mrs. Bhosale, Mrs. Geetabai Gaikwad, Mrs. Leela Gaikwad, Mrs. Muktabai Sarvagaud and Mrs. Pyaarelal Kureel made speeches.
9 *Janata*, 8th February 1947.
10 *Waraale*, p.129.
11 *Janata*, 24th August, 1946.
12 *Janata*, 21st September 1946.
13 *Jaibheem* (Madras), 4th May 1947.
14 *Janata*, 24th August 1946.
15 *Janata*, 24th August 1946.
16 *Arun*, 19th December 1947:The chairperson of the meeting held at Kunjilal Peth, Baabulkheda, was Yashodabai.
17 *Janata*, 30th January, 1954:a til-gul ceremony was organised by Dalit Mahila Mandal at Pune. Mrs. Bheemabai Chavan made a speech.
18 *Janata*, 5th February 1949:The following women made speeches at the inauguration of the Ramabai Vanita Samaaj: Waalubai Bansode, deputy chairperson -- Rukmini Bansode, treasurer - Bhaagubai Gaikwad.
19 The following women made speeches: chairperson - Mrs. Devakabai Damodar Kamble, deputy chairperson - Mrs. Sakhubai Jaanu Mohite, treasurer - Shrimati Subhadrabai Kaasaare, secretary - Meerabai Pagaare, secretary - Shantabai Shankarrao Wadwalkar. Members - Susheelabai Narayan Jadhav, Mrs. Nalinibai N. Mohite, Mrs. Rakhmabai Hari Dhepe, Mrs. Kashibai Sakharam Naadaarkar, Draupadibai Bhiva Kadam, Laadibai Vitthal Pedambkar, Shantabai Bansi Gaangurde, Mrs. Pavitrabai Thokale, Mandakinibai Taambuskar, Sarojinibai Jadhav, Dhanaabai Bhaatankar, Meerabai Pagaare, Shalinibai Gaadekar.
20 The following women made speeches at the welcome function for Maai Ambedkar

organised by the Devi Ramabai Ambedkar Student Aashram Building Fund committee : Shantabai Wadwalkar, Subhadrabai Kaasaare, Muktabai Kaamble, Mrs. Borikar, Champubai Kamble, Susheelabai Pawar, Ramabai Shirke.

21 *Arun*, 28th March 1949.

10

Babasaheb's Views on Women

When the movement of the untouchables for their own liberation gained a capable leader like Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the burning flame of identity was kindled in a community that had long been caught in poverty, ignorance and superstition. A community that had lost its sense of self. An ignorant people that had long been deceived by being told, "As you have been kept since limitless ages, so you must remain", and "keep doing your work, do not expect any reward", began to wake up to the truth. The feeling of inferiority in their minds began to dissipate.

Dr. Ambedkar's speech at the Mahaad satyagraha brought about a revolution among the untouchable women. Their thoughts and behaviour began to change. They began to take part in meetings and conferences in large numbers. Women's organisations were formed. Women began to speak with vigour at meetings and conferences. They went on processions, and became active in the movement and its struggles.

We cannot forget that Dr. Ambedkar's liberal views on women were a motivating force behind this transformation of untouchable women.

It would be wrong to say that this liberal viewpoint held by Dr. Ambedkar was a result of his higher education abroad, that it was

a product of the influence on his mind of gender equality in the West. Even when he was a student, Babasaheb held that girls as well as boys must be educated, and that women must be active in all spheres along with men.

Babasaheb's own family was cultured; his father had taught his daughters and sisters to read and write. Babasaheb's aunt used to give exegeses on books like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In the families of those who were in military service, girls as well as boys were sent to school.

When Babasaheb was a student in the U.S., he wrote a letter to Jamadar Jadhav (Poipkar), his neighbour in the military residential colony in Satara.[1] In this letter he congratulated him for sending his daughter to school, and wrote further, that it is wrong to say that parents only give birth to their children, but their children's karma is their own. Children must be moulded. If girls as well as boys are educated, there is no reason why we should not make rapid progress; so you must spread these thoughts at least among your close relatives. Babasaheb here succinctly points out the responsibility of parents in the educating of girls.

Babasaheb started a college in a socially backward town like Aurangabad that had no concept of co-education, and admitted girls together with boys. Not only this he arranged a bus service from the city to the college so that girls could attend in large numbers.[2] Babasaheb showed everyone that girls had an independent existence in society as individuals. Also, in a speech before the Mahila Mandal at the Ravali Camp in Bombay, he stressed that virtuous conduct was as important as education for girls.[3]

In his letters to Ramabai written from London, Babasaheb would encourage her to read and write. He would affectionately inquire about her studies. Ramabai began to study to please her husband, and wrote letters to him while he was abroad.

Babasaheb was not able to make the same special efforts for his wife's education and intellectual development as Justice Ranade did for his wife. There were two reasons for this: the difference in social background and culture between Ambedkar and Ranade,

and the difference in the nature of their daily work routines. Undoubtedly Babasaheb deserves credit for having oriented his wife towards education.[4]

Parents should not ruin their children's lives by marrying them off at an early age. Just as the husband's preferences regarding a wife are taken into account, so should a girl's views about her choice of a husband be consulted. Often a beautiful girl is given to an ugly man, which shows that girls are denied the right to express their preference. In a speech before a group of students in 1938, Babasaheb declared that a woman is an individual; therefore, she too must have individual freedom.[5]

In the 1942 Mahila Parishad, he placed special emphasis on some points: "Do not arrange early marriages of boys and girls, let them first be economically independent. Bring to their notice the ill effects of having too many children. Marriage is an obstacle in the development of a girl; do not impose marriage on her. After marriage the wife must be her husband's friend and a housewife having equal rights. She must not become the slave of her husband"; and so on.

The speech that Babasaheb made before the women in the Chavdaar Tank satyagraha in Mahaad brought about a radical transformation in the women. He repeatedly made speeches of this kind. In Chembur, Bombay on 29th May 1953 he told the women, "it is not correct to wear heavy and cumbersome jewellery; your dress must not be such that your caste can be recognised".

When Dr. Ambedkar went to Sawantwadi to plead a murder case in October 1932, he addressed the women in a similar fashion at a meeting organised by the untouchable community. It was a speech giving advice much in the way a mother advises a daughter before she leaves for her marital home. "However hard your life may be, send your sons and daughters to school. If the men of the house bring home the meat of carcasses, oppose them strictly. Even if your clothes are torn, mend them and wash them before you wear them. There should be no visible difference between you and caste Hindu women. Even if you do this much, it will be

as if you are playing an important role in the activity of liberating our community."

Babasaheb spoke like this wherever there was a gathering of women.

On 25th December 1952 a Dalit Parishad was held in Nipani. Men and women were present in huge numbers. Addressing the women Babasaheb said, "You are eking out your days eating the meat of dead animals. What worse situation can befall you? You too must join the struggle."[6]

Babasaheb knew from experience what poverty is. Around him were the untouchable people who could barely manage to feed and clothe themselves. His heart ached for the mothers and sisters who were thus exposed to shame because of poverty. He wrote to Bhaurao Gaikwad, saying that he intended to distribute saris to hundreds of poor and needy women on the day of Buddha Purnima.[7]

Babasaheb also reminded his people that poverty and large numbers of children would keep the community from making rapid progress.

In a speech to students in 1938, Babasaheb explained that the responsibility of family planning fell on both men and women. He spoke about his 14 brothers and sisters and the poverty of his childhood. "We can properly bring up only one child. If there are less children, women are freed from the terrible burden of childbearing and can use their strength for other tasks."

Prabhakar Roham, the Independent Labour Party legislator, influenced by Babasaheb's views, placed a resolution on family planning before the legislative assembly. In the same year, Babasaheb supported a Bill concerning the welfare of women workers. He argued that, since a woman needs rest in the time before and after childbirth, the employer should bear the cost of her paid leave.[8]

Babasaheb had a heartfelt wish to give shelter to orphaned children and to abandoned women and unmarried mothers. He therefore thought of building an orphanage in Aurangabad. He would say, "Small children may be left here. I will take care of the children who are left here by poor, destitute mothers who are abandoned or unmarried."[9]

He would never tolerate the injustice done to women by men. If he saw a man treating his wife unequally, he would pull him up at once. One such incident is memorable. Jeevappa Aidale, a close acquaintance of Babasaheb, lived in the village of Wavi in Solapur district. An activist named Karbhari from that village was about to marry for a second time at the age of about 55 years because he had no child. Babasaheb asked him, "if your not having a child is because of some fault in you, and your wife for that reason thinks of taking a second husband, will that be all right by you? Just as you want a child, so does she. Women too have a desire for children!"[10]

Babasaheb used to consider morality very important. Thus in 1932, in a speech before Waghyas, Muralis and Devadasis he said, "Give up prostitution and live a moral life. We are not afraid of poverty; it is with us from our birth. So don't take up this profession for fear of poverty." To convince them he gave the example of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* who turned her back on the wealth of the Kouravas to accompany the Pandavas into exile. He took the stand that women must be uplifted morally by refusing to accept the money offered by Patte Bapurao for his work, declaring, "I don't want the money raised by making Pawalabai dance."

Dr. Ambedkar testified before the Simon Commission on 23rd October 1928. The first demand he made was that all men and women who had attained majority should have the right to vote. He repeated this demand at the Round Table Conference.

In the various agitations that he launched, he tried to give dalit women appropriate opportunities on the basis of their capacity to work. He included two women, Mrs. Savitribai Borade and Mrs. Ambubai Gaikwad in the executive of the *Janata* newspaper in 1932-33.[11] He also created separate platforms for women in all the important conferences of the dalits. That is, women's conferences would be organised side by side with the men's.

Through this, the women later on set up their own forums.

Recognising that women's rights, their uplift and development would not be achieved through advice alone, and that certain legal provisions were necessary, Babasaheb prepared the Hindu Code Bill for Parliament.

Hindu Code Bill

There was a time when women like Gargi, Maitreyi, Sulabha and Vidyadhari were learned in the Vedas and Shastras. Women had equal rights with men. There was one code of behaviour for both men and women. Similarly, in the Buddhist age there were famous Buddhist bhikshunis named Kundal Kasha and Kshema who were well-versed in debate and learned in the *Dharmashastras*.[12] In the Jain and Buddhist faiths too, women had equal status. Women had freedom to learn, teach, to engage in professions, develop themselves, and to reach Nirvana. But later on, the codes of conduct and the laws of the *Manusmruti* and the *Yaadnyavalkyasmruti* laid down relations of superiority and inferiority between human beings; these rules and laws served the selfish interests of a particular class. Also, these laws were formulated as the result of the clash between the Hindu and Buddhist religions. The *Manusmruti* took away the freedom that Buddhism gave to women and Shudras.

The Buddha gave women a position of equality and a respected place in society. Thus it is true to say that Bhagwan Buddha was the first upholder of women's liberation.

Patriarchal culture in Hindustan bore the stamp of the *Manusmruti's* dicta on women and Shudras for generations; so much so that this society was in effect a stranger to ideas of women's autonomy.

Even though the arrival of the British brought waves of reform that included gender equity, no one showed the courage to completely repudiate the laws and ethics laid down for women and Shudras by the *Dharmashastras*. This was a task for the government. When the nation gained independence and a new Constitution was to be formed, it was necessary that it should lay

down a new system of law and ethics so that all citizens could set out on the path of progress and development.

When Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was appointed chairman of the Constitution Committee, the Hindu Code Bill prepared by the Rao Committee was placed before him. He made fundamental changes to it and presented the reformulated Hindu Code Bill to the Legislative Committee on 12th August 1948. The new Bill bore the stamp of Babasaheb's progressive ideas. All those who upheld a reactionary ideology opposed the Bill with the utmost vehemence.

The debate over the Bill took place in an atmosphere of intense and fierce opposition. The Bill challenged the patriarchal social order and honoured the Indian woman by giving her a position equal to men. It gave the Hindu woman equal rights with men in marriage and divorce.

1. The woman had the right to divorce.
2. If the husband divorced his wife she was entitled to alimony.
3. Only one marriage was legal for each individual and second marriages without adequate reason were banned, so that the woman could gain some stability.
4. Women also were allowed to adopt children.
5. The adoption of daughters was allowed, as that of sons had been.
6. Women had right over their own earnings.
7. Daughters were to have an equal share of their father's income.
8. A daughter could become heir to her father's property.
9. Inter-caste marriages were made legal.
10. A woman could decide on the disposing of her own property.

In short, the Hindu Code bill was divided into 9 parts with 137 clauses and 7 annexures. A clash of opinions of unprecedented fervour took place over the Bill. The orthodox declared that the religious laws laid down by the ancient sages were being destroyed by an untouchable. Babu Rajendra Prasad, the first President of the Indian Republic and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel were among the opponents of the Bill. Besides orthodox Hindus like

Shankaracharya Brahmanand Saraswati, Swami Karapatriji, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya and others, Azimuddin Mohammed, a Muslim elected from Calcutta also opposed the Bill.

Protest marches were held outside Parliament against the Bill. Slogans of 'Down with the Hindu Code Bill' were given. Babasaheb received death threats. Jereshastri criticised the Bill in filthy language, saying, "Ganges water from a gutter cannot be considered holy. However appropriate this new Code may be, since it comes from a Mahaar like Ambedkar we cannot accept it as our standard."

V.S. Khandekar responded to this despicable criticism by saying, "Dr. Ambedkar's scholarship has the power to sanctify even the gutter thoughts of reactionaries like Jereshastri."[13] Karapatri Swami tried to stir up opposition to the Bill by spreading the rumour that the Hindu Code Bill sanctioned marriage between brothers and sisters.

Babasaheb got the English-language Bill translated into Hindi by Sohanlal Shastri and distributed free copies to all Hindu organisations.[14] He paid five thousand rupees to Pandit Dharmadev Vidyalankar to seek out the verses in the Hindu Smrutis which sanctioned inheritance rights for daughters and permitted widow remarriage, and published them in a series of articles in the *Virarjun Samachar.*

Babasaheb Ambedkar also urged the All India Women's Congress to campaign in favour of the Bill. Speeches supporting the Bill were made in several women's meetings and meetings of the Arya Samaj.

A number of scholars met under Babasaheb's chairmanship, including Durgabai, who later became wife of C.D. Deshmukh, and two other women. Durgabai in her speech described the pitiful situation of Hindu women and declared that independence is not just for men, the welfare of women must also be ensured in independent India. In today's age the woman will not remain a slave, she wants her rights so that she can live like the ideal women of Hinduism.[15] Padmaja Naidu and Rajashree supported the Bill in Parliament.

A conference was organised in the Kitte Bhandari hall in Dadar, Mumbai, on 21st August 1949 to support the Hindu Code Bill or

the 'Bhimasmruti'. Twenty-five women's associations and ten other social organisations took part. J.R.Gharpure, Principal of the Law College in Pune, had agreed to be the chair at the conference. Mrs. Chandrakala Haare published a pamphlet for this conference supporting the Hindu Code Bill.[16]

The former Sheriff of Mumbai took part in a meeting held in Wilson College, Mumbai, at 5.30 pm on 19th January 1950, presided over by N.M. Joshi, Urmila Mehta, Professor Tope, Professor Pandya, Professor Kapadia, and Mrs. Mithaan Labh. At the conference both the women announced their support for the Hindu Code Bill in their speeches and roundly criticised those who opposed the Bill.[17]

Rajendrababu used the weapon of a threat to resign if the Hindu Code Bill was passed. Faced with this, Pandit Nehru remained silent about the Bill, and it was postponed repeatedly until it was finally suspended on 26th September 1951. Unable to tolerate this, Babasaheb submitted his resignation from the post of Law Minister on 27th September.

Later, a Maharastrian Brahmin named Haribhau Pataskar was chosen to enable the Bill to be passed in piecemeal form. The Bill was partially passed.[18]

Gender equality had won a somewhat belated victory.

Endnotes

1 Khairmode, C.B. :Vol. I, p. 66-67.
2 Gaanjre, M.F. : *The Speeches of Dr. Ambedkar,* Vol. 6, p. 49.
3 Ibid., p.86.
4 Gavaankar, Rohini (1989) : research paper on Dr. Ambedkar's work for women's emancipation, p.2
5 Ibid., p.3.
6 Waraale, p.177.
7 Kharaat, Shankarrao: *Doctor Ambedkaraanchi Patre* (the letters of Dr. Ambedkar) letter dated 3rd May 1952, p.341-42.
8 Gavaankar, Rohini (1989) : research paper.
9 Waraale, p.183.
10 ibid:, p.265.
11 *Janata* special issue, 1933.

12 Bhagwat, Narayan Keshav: *Paali Waangmayaatil Tera Bhikshuni Ratne*, p.90.
13 Ganveer, Ratnakar: *Doctor Ambedkar Aani Hindu Code Bill*, p.56.
14 Shastri, Sohanalal, p.91.
15 Ibid., p.97-99.
16 *Janata*, 27th August 1949.
17 *Navaa Kaal*, 20th August 1950.
18 Shastri, Sohanalal, p.107.

11

Enlightenment Through Literature

The main objective of Dr. Ambedkar's movement was to fan the spark of a sense of identity into an intense flame in the minds of the untouchables, and to instil in them the courage and the capacity to fight for their rights. With this objective he undertook many struggles, fought many fights, and so in order to reach the people he started newspapers like *Bahishkrut Bharat, Mooknayak, Janata* and *Prabuddha Bharat,* and wrote prolifically in them. He also wrote books like *Who Were the Shudras?, Thoughts on Pakistan, Annihilation of Caste,* etc. All this was ideological literature, intended to enlighten the community and partly a form of propaganda. The seeds of what later came to be called dalit literature were in this writing. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was indeed the father of dalit literature.

The activists of the Ambedkar movement who worked for the enlightenment of society, making speeches in meetings and conferences, also drew inspiration from Ambedkar and propagated his thoughts and principles through newspapers.

Women took part together with men in the Ambedkar movement; they did not lag behind in the field of literature either. New thoughts and a new identity flowered in their minds too. The urge to express their feelings gathered force. And so, wherever they got the opportunity, women began to speak and to write.

Women's thoughts found place in *Bahishkrut Bharat, Janata, Prabuddha Bharat* and other periodicals. Later some women earned a name as writers. Of course these women came mainly from major cities like Mumbai, Solapur, Nagpur, Nashik and Pune.

Some untouchables sought out the glorious history of the valour, the achievements, the intellectual wealth and the steadfastness of their forefathers and began research on the history of the untouchables. L.N. Hardas of Kamathi, Nagpur, decided to hold a literary festival (sahitya sammelan) to create literature that would throw light on the ancient and modern history of different castes within the untouchable community. He also decided to establish a publishing society for books based on research, and brought out a pamphlet appealing for people's contributions towards both these objectives.[1] Babu Hardas had also started a journal called *Maharattha* in 1927. He also wrote articles and songs on the theme of social reform.

A literary discussion society was formed in Nagpur on 9th November 1941 with the same objective.[2] Its main aim was service to literature. It was decided to promote literature through talks by well-known literary figures, discussions of traditional literature, debates, analysis of *povadas* and other folk songs, book reviews, spreading literacy, encouraging research, and any other means that might come to hand on different occasions. The executive committee included a woman member, Miss Sugandhabai Shende.

Revaram Kavaade was trying to organise a *sahitya sammelan,* a literary conference. Accordingly, the first festival of dalit poets was held under the banner of the PWF in the grounds of Yugantar High School on 6th March 1947 with Revaram Kavaade as chairman.[3]

It was not as if only men were enthusiastic about literature and sahitya sammelans; women were also entering the field of literature. Anjali Pawar from Nagar spoke in favour of a suggestion that sammelans of dalit writers should be organised, and expressed the hope that as many writers as possible from the common people should be allowed to enter.[4]

This kind of awareness about literature implies that women's mental horizons had widened considerably. Women were looking deeply into literature, politics, education, traditions and customs and expressing their thoughts on these subjects.

When Babu L.N. Hardas stood for the first round of elections and was trying to get elected to the Council, a woman called Shantabai Gondane issued a pamphlet, which was published in the *Patitpaawan* weekly, to promote his candidature and spread word about his election symbol.[5]

In this pamphlet she described Hardas in bold and emphatic language: "Babu Hardas has no vices or bad habits. His only habit is that of selfless service to society. His horse, like the horse of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi is untiring and that is the key to his success."

At the All India Dalit Mahila Parishad, Meenambal Shivraj said, "Each individual must find a similar key in his own everyday life, and for this, he or she must examine himself/herself closely. We must recognise our duty towards our children who are the future pillars of our nation. Before parents can mould their children they must first mould themselves."[6]

The Joint Secretary of the Scheduled Caste Students' Federation, Kausalya Nandeshwar (Baisantri), had written an essay in English with the title, 'My sisters, think, decide and act.'[7] She says that besides doing our duty to our children, we must carry out some concrete work for the development of our deprived people. Women in our country have many problems and to solve them we must build a strong organisation of Indian women and fight in solidarity.

While thinking about social questions and organisation, the women were also expressing their views on the need for reform in religious practices. A woman called Sharda Shevale wrote an article[8] in the *Janata* weekly about funeral customs in her community, with the message, "Untouchables should not bury their dead, they should cremate them."

Mrs. Draupadibai Bapu Kamble, responding to this article, wrote that if we consider Brahmins and Lingayats, which are two

upper castes, the Brahmins cremate their dead whereas the Lingayats bury them. Then where is the fault in untouchables burying their dead? Besides, it costs more to burn corpses than to bury them. In the same weekly, Mrs. Shanta Ramchandra Jadhav also expressed surprise about Sharda Shevale's views. Only upper-caste Hindus believe in the excellence of the fire ritual. The majority of religions in the world do not give fire to their corpses, they bury them, because the body is made of dust and must return to dust.

Sharda Shewale, reviewing the published correspondence regarding her article, wrote:[9] "I have been misunderstood. I only meant to say that, although our community has made progress in politics, we still lag behind in social reforms. In the funeral rites, corpses should be burnt, not buried. Where is the financial problem in this? In any case we spend money like water on the eleventh day after a death.* When a dead person's body is cremated one can cremate another body in the same place afterwards. You cannot do this when a body is buried. It is a matter of changing traditions."

Women began to articulate their opinions through letters in newspapers. They began to ask pointed questions in newspapers about the events taking place around them.[10] What is more, their thirst for knowledge was being met by what they read in newspapers, and they were demanding special sections for women so that they too could write.[11] They started to express their views through their writings.

Dalit women writers took the position that all must be aware of the need to limit the number of children.[12] Birth control is the responsibility of both men and women. Just as women help men in all their work, men should help women in childbirth, child rearing, and the education of children. Since men and women are like the two wheels of a cart, so they bear equal responsibility.

* Translator's note: In serving meals to large numbers of guests to observe the end of the period of full mourning.

Men and women are equal. These views were expressed by a woman named Saraswati in the *Janata* weekly.

These thoughts appealed to the women and they made them their own. They supported an ideology that looked at women with sympathy and considered men and women to be equal.[13]

A writer called Sheela Shejwal, who wanted to send out a message of equality between man and woman, suggested, in a satirical play entitled *Fashionable Young Woman,*[14] that when young men go to view a prospective bride even the clothes on their back may be hired, and they are willing to send a wife out to work and live comfortably on her earnings.

Men and women are equal whatever religion or caste they may belong to. Caste and religion should not come in the way of relations between men and women, and so each one of us must forget caste divisions and bring about inter-caste marriages. People of the Bhangi, Chambhar and Mahaar castes must inter-marry, only then will the walls of caste, sub-caste and Varna begin to crumble. Each of us must take to heart Buddha's teachings, that we should bury the inequality among us. Thus women through their writings were supporting mixed marriages.[15]

A major concern visible in these writings by women was education. Mahatma Phule, pointing out that there is no progress without education said,

For want of learning, the mind was lost,
For want of a mind, morality was lost,
For want of morality, action was lost,
For want of action, wealth was lost,
The Shudras collapsed from lack of wealth.
So much loss from a lack of learning.

Babasaheb's emphasis in all his teachings was on education. So in any meeting he would first expound on education. Now women also began writing in periodicals on this subject. The social reformers have launched education in this country, they said, but in the villages and the city slums, the untouchable people are still deprived of an education. And untouchable women are not taking

the matter as seriously as they should.[16] The people in the villages must be awakened. So we must all give up the idea that schooling leads girls astray, and all parents must send their children to school. Our daughters must learn as much as the daughters of Brahmins do.[17]

Mrs. Panakabai N. Wankhede writes, under the heading 'The Duties of Women of the Untouchable Class', that it is women who are responsible for the indifference towards education among the untouchables.[18] She says: "Even though men and women differ in their bodies, mentally women are stronger than men. It is women who give good values to children. Since the woman is concerned about children's development, she must be aware regarding the question of their education."

Nalini Kashiram Jagtap, from Mumbai, writes in the same vein:[19] "Women should not expect to get men's sympathy in every task they do. They should not confine themselves to the kitchen and the children; they must develop themselves. We must seek out grains of knowledge for ourselves. Women must remember that their progress can only come from education." An article on the same subject was written by Parvatibai Pachade.[20]

Yashodabai Raoji Salve poses a challenge: "Those who think unsympathetically about the education of women have a particular complaint about educated women. When such women acquire learning and exalted positions, they do not mix with uneducated women; they are ashamed of their community. Will our educated sisters put a stop to this trend?"[21] She adds, "I do not understand why the few women in our community who have passed their SSC or acquired a degree should be ashamed to mingle with uneducated women."

Susheela Gajbiye, in a satirical article on the same theme entitled "An Epidemic Disease", launches a sharp attack on the educated, saying that if the educated have a feeling of alienation from the uneducated of their community, this is a kind of disease.[22] She further says, "The so-called educated youth and donkeys in exalted posts have succumbed completely to the disease I am talking about." She advises those educated persons in white-collar occupations who run away from their uneducated brethren to fight this 'disease' and work for the uplift of the ignorant.

The above quotation not only demonstrtates women's intelligence, but is a fitting answer to those who say that women have no sense of humour!

Women are often the subject of contempt, humour, and caricature. Women's physical attributes and their mental capacity are a storehouse of subjects for humorous writers. The ideas that men hold a monopoly in intelligence could pass as long as women did not take to writing. The false ideas of a male-dominated society were earlier passed over without comment, but when women began to learn and to write, to display the spark of their intelligence, a certain kind of honesty was brought to writing. Susheela Gajbiye's writings demonstrate this.

Some women tried to depict the sense of identity and self-esteem that was being born in the minds of untouchables through the medium of stories. This was a way to take Babasaheb's message to the people.

Mrs. Padmavatibai Asaikar in her story, "An Artificial Life", shows how people do not care for untouchables' learning or the posts they hold, they are thought of only in terms of their caste. Even those in favour of social reform treat the untouchables in an artificial manner.

Mrs. Sheela V. Pawar, of Nashik, has described the minds of untouchables who do not bow before oppression, but are ready to give a blow for a blow to an oppressive zamindar in her story, "A Haven for Rest".[23] Draupadibai Shekwal, from Bhusawal, in her story, "Independent Saru" writes about an untouchable woman who faces unimaginable poverty but lives her life with self-esteem, showing no sense of servility or self-pity.[24]

We can list a number of stories and articles by women writers on similar themes, such as Susheela Gajbiyes's, "Far-off Lights", Sanjeevani Kamble's, "Stigma", Prabhavati Bhalerao's, "The Rebel Fighting Against Injustice", Vatsala Gore's, "Women Unite", Dhondabai More's, "Bhagwant and Dhaniya", and others.

Women as well as men wrote about Babasaheb's leadership, how he struggled with selflessness sacrifice, the efforts he undertook for the untouchable, the unique nature of his work and the gratitude that the untouchable people felt towards him. Women wrote beautifully about their first darshan of Babasaheb, his work, the inspiration they received from every word he spoke and the transformation he brought about in the lives of the untouchables.

With the arrival of Ambedkar on the political scene, the untouchables were stirred to activity, the women were also awakened, and many Mahila Mandals were formed among the untouchables. When the women from such a Mandal began to shout slogans praising Babasaheb, the devotees of the Congress were disturbed. This is the situation described in Anusaya Kedare's story, "Lamp of Revolution"[25]

Many people in various ways, were studying Babasaheb's life-trajectory and writing about it. This was a source of inspiration. Mrs. Anusaya M. Kamble, from Chikurdi, wrote on Babasaheb's life in her article "Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability" and went on to talk in a light-hearted style about how aware mothers should recognise the trends of the age and behave in a fashion that will enable their children to make progress.[26]

In her article, "A Living Flame", Nalini Balwant Salve from Satara gives a magnificent description of how crowds are overcome by their first glimpse of Babasaheb.[27] She says, "Here comes our god. As they meet him, the bodies which seem to shine black through ragged clothes, are filled with love till they spill over. Tears of joy mingled with the sweat on their bodies; what a sweet confluence." Malini Kashinath Jagtap, from Saigaon, has depicted the revolution taking place among the untouchables in an article entitled "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, A Man of Our Times".[28] She writes of Babasaheb's greatness, of how he brought about a social, economic, political and religious revolution in the lives of the untouchables, and her writing displays her analytical approach and her knowledge of the social sciences.

Thus, the women, with their unlimited faith in Babasaheb, were

observing all his activities with great awareness and thinking about them. Babasaheb announced his intention to change his religion in Yeole in 1935. In the matter of which faith to convert to, Buddhism already had a special priority in his mind. Thus whenever he spoke about conversion, he would mention Buddhism. Recognising the special place for Buddhism in Babasaheb's mind, his followers began to study Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist stories and to write about them. Mrs. Kantabai Nanarao Ingle of Latur wrote an article in 1953 with the title, "The Place of Buddhism in the Life of Mankind" [29] in which she explains Buddhist philosophy in simple and straightforward language, in an attempt to bring this philosophy to the people.

The setting of the revolutionary sun of the downtrodden came on 6th December 1956. The poor and oppressed people of India were plunged into sorrow. Kalavatibai Inamdar from Kalambi, District Satara, wrote a memorial article entitled, "Baba, Were You in a Hurry to Leave Us?", in which she describes the feelings of the people who lost Babasaheb just as the untouchable community had begun to make some progress.[30]

Even after Babasaheb's Mahaparinirvana, several activists continued to write in periodicals like *Janata, Prabuddha Bharat* and *Jaibheem,* to keep alive the consciousness of the people. Among them were women writer-activists like Mukta Sarvagoud, Shantabai Dani and others. Babasaheb had created a circle of light, and the rays of his thoughts caused many writers, critics and thinkers to shine in diverse fields of study.

Dalit literature had started a new chapter by writing about the pain, the rebellion and the identitiy of dalits. The first generation of these writers included Annabhau Sathe, N.R. Shende, Shankarrao Kharat and Baburao Bagul.

After 1960 the stream of dalit literature became a torrent, taking different genres like the short story, poetry, novels, autobiographies and analytical pieces into its flow. Later on women writers also entered the current. Women's problems began to be viewed from their own perspective. Following on the stories and poems mentioned earlier in this chapter, women began to write

autobiographies in which they reflected on the overall condition of their community and their own development. Women began to demonstrate their progress and enlightenment by writing analytical articles and criticism.

Women like Sugandha Shende, Babytai Kamble, Kumud Paawade, Hira Bansode, Dr. Jyoti Lanjewar, Susheela Moon, Meena Gajbhiye, Dr. Asha Thorat, Nanda Tayawade, Vijaya Ingole, Urmila Pawar, Nalini Somkunwar, Shantabai Kamble, Usha Bhalerao, Sandhya Tambe, Leela Bhele, Sangeeta Khandagale, Suresh Bhagat, Meenakshi Moon, are at present carrying forward the thread of Ambedkar's thought through their writing. Their writing is remarkable for its literary qualities as well as its social commitment.

These women do not express their social commitment only through writing, but they are making an important contribution to the Ambedkar movement by establishing women's organisations.

Endnotes

1 *Maharashtra,* 4th April 1934.
2 *Janata,* 3rd January 1942.
3 *Janata,* 15th March 1947.
4 *Janata,* 5th December 1953.
5 *Patitpaavan,* 26th December 1936:
"A Public Appeal to the Untouchable women voters of Nagpur district: To Whom Will You Give Your Vote?" the writer, a woman, says: "Babu Hardaas has no vices of any kind. He does not drink. He does not frequent theatres and cinema-houses. He has only one habit and that is self-sacrifice, serving the society, thinking night and day of the welfare of his caste brothers. Hardaas Babu's horse is like the horse of Raani Laxmibai of Jhansi, like Ahilyabai Holkar's horse : untiring. Just as these queens won state power mounted on their horses, so too Babu Hardaas has mounted his horse. This horse too will not tire, it will race on towards victory. This is the auspicious symbol of the horse."
6 *Jaibheem* (Madras, English), 2nd July 1947:
Meenambal Shivraj says: "To save the nation we must first protect its children; but I say, before the children we must protect their parents. As the quarry is, so will the stone be; most great men of the world have benefited from the guidance of at least one parent. Before they mould their children the parents must first mould themselves. Every ideal parent makes sacrifices for the progress of his/her child. But, as the English writer George Eliot has said, our fine ideas melt into the air. Progress is not achieved merely by spending money for our children or putting grand ambitions into their minds. Children are extremely sensitive and, for them, their parents are everything. So , children follow the example of their parents.

Some parents take care of their children's bodily health, some of their minds and some their spiritual development. But the ideal parent is one who looks after the overall development of the child. Such parents sometimes scold the child, even beat him/her; but at the same time they gain the child's confidence and become his/her friend. So the children don't hide anything from their parents.
"It is wrong to think that book knowledge or knowledge of the outside world is enough for them. If the parents do not recognise their own responsibility, their children will remain ignorant. Only an ideal parent can influence his/her child. When children develop as they should they bring joy to the parents also.
"No person lives only for himself, he influences others also, at some time or the other. Not that this influence will always be for the good. It can also be bad. Some parents think that their children are their greatest happiness and they cater to their smallest whims, they allow them to behave as they please. But this is a great mistake. Parents should recognise their responsibility in bringing up their children. Their primary objective should be to give the best of themselves to their children. As parents we can mould our children or spoil our children. Some parents think that they will mould their children when they are older, but that is a mistake. Up to the age of seven or eight years children's minds are pliable, if we do not shape them then it will be difficult to mould them later. Only those parents who try to shape the lives of their children from the very beginning should be regarded as ideal parents. Such parents will get satisfaction and joy from their children."
(I have translated this passage from the Marathi in the book, I have not attempted to trace the original English version – translator).
7 *Jaibheem* (Madras, English), 16th July 1947:
Kausalyabai Baisantri says in her speech, "Women have many problems. Because they are not aware about motherhood, the education of children, child development, child marriage, nuclear families, laws regarding widows etc., women have been living in the dark. Mahatma Gandhi's Congress Party has a women's organisation. The All-India Women's Conference is a puppet in the hands of the Congress. Recently the Muslim League has also created an organisation of Muslim women. The Progressive Democratic Group has also created an organisation of enlightened women. So it is clear that the women of the dalit community must also form a separate organisation. Women should not remain indifferent to politics now. Untouchable women must unite and enter politics side by side with their brothers. Only then will we be able to make cultural progress."
8 *Janata,* 24th October 1953.
9 *Janata,* 14th November 1953.
10 *Janata,* 18th June 1955.
11 *Janata,* 18th June 1955: letter of Mrs. Saraswatibai.
12 *Janata,* 17th April 1954 : counter-question by Miss Kamalini, from south Satara : "Why the neglect of this issue?" (contraception)
13 *Janata,* 23rd April 1955: Mrs. Vasudha Shinde, Love Lane, Bombay..
14 *Janata,* 31st July 1954.
15 *Janata,* 12th December 1951.
16 *Janata,* 21st November 1953 : letter from Shaarda Shewale.

17 *Janata*, 12th December 1953: reaction from Nirmala Jadhav.
18 *Janata*, 2nd January 1954.
19 *Janata*, 9th January 1954.
20 *Prabuddha Bhaarat*, 5th May 1955.
21 *Janata*, 16th January 1954.
22 *Janata*, November 1953.
23 *Janata*, 5th December 1963.
24 *Janata*, 7th May 1955.
25 *Janata*, 14th April 1946.
26 *Janata*, 14th April 1951.
27 *Janata*, 14th April 1953.
28 *Janata*, 3rd April 1954.
29 *Janata*, 21st March 1953.
30 *Prabuddha Bhaarat*, January 1957.

12

Victory of the Dhamma

It is said with reference to the issue of temple entry by untouchables that all three temple-entry satyagrahas (the Ambadevi temple entry at Amaravati, the Parvati temple entry in Pune and the Kalaram Temple entry in Nashik) were unsuccessful. This may be a historical fact strictly speaking, but from the viewpoint of the social sciences the temple entry movement was a social and religious revolution.

As a result of these constant struggles it became apparent that the untouchables' solidarity, organisation and the participation of women contained an immense strength. Among the untouchables, since every caste and sub-caste had its own unique way of seeing itself, these differences became clear. The true nature of the newspapers and the social reformers who called themselves progressive and egalitarian became apparant. Most importantly, the bitterness about untouchables in the minds of caste Hindus and the position of untouchables in Hinduism now stood exposed to the world. The overall effect of this was much more important than the actual matter of temple entry, and it pointed the way for the liberation of the untouchables.

On the evening of 13th October 1935, in Yeole Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar announced his decision to change his religion. About ten thousand men and women were present at this meeting. The

welcome committee was headed by Amrutrao Rankhambe.

All over the country there were varied reactions to this announcement on conversion. Mahatma Gandhi gave the first reaction from Wardha on 15th October. He said, "Religion is not a house or a piece of clothing that one may cast off at will. It is not a part of the body; it is a sign of the soul." To this reaction Babasaheb replied, "Inequality is the basis of Hinduism and to deny the backward people the opportunity to develop the humanity inherent in them is the morality of this religion. If the religion of our ancestors gives us no means to train ourselves for righteous behaviour and does not inspire us, why should we remain in that faith?"

Babasaheb went on to say, "The untouchables spent all their strength to attain the simple rights of citizenship and to gain equality in the social, religious, economic and political spheres. But all their efforts, strength and sacrifice were wasted. If the untouchables give up the Hindu faith as the last resort, the question of fighting with the Hindus will cease to arise. It is because we are Hindus that we have to live life under the shadow of insult. That is why I declare that although I was born a Hindu I will not die a Hindu."

The impact of the announcement of conversion was felt far and wide. Meetings of dalits were held at district and tehsil levels. Dalit women attended these meetings in large numbers and they were given an opportunity to speak from the stage. What is even more important, women organised their own conferences to give their support to the call for conversion. This was a sign that women were finding their own sense of identity. A Bombay Presidency Mahaar Parishad to support conversion was held at the Purandare stadium in Dadar on 30th and 31st May 1936. At the same time, a women's conference was held, which was attended by thousands of women.[1]

Expressing the support of the Mahila Parishad for a resolution on conversion, Janabai More said, "We all know that this Bombay Presidency Mahaar Parishad has been called so that we can exchange views on the public call for conversion that Dr. Babasaheb

made at Yeole. I am standing here on behalf of the women's community of Bombay to support conversion.

"Doctorsaheb's declaration about conversion has caused people of all religions to wake up with a start. They are prepared to attack our movement. And they will do anything to show their domination over us. They should remember that our untouchable community will no longer tolerate their domineering attitude.

"Doctorsaheb should carry out the act of conversion as soon as possible, he has the support of all of us women. Whichever religion Doctorsaheb may accept, we women are ready and eager to join that faith. I say this and give my support to the resolution on behalf of the women of our community."

Miss Rajabai Gaikwad said, "I too am here to give support to conversion on behalf of my sisters. Will we not answer the call of this Mahatma who heard the cries of the untouchables even when he was in western countries, and who made others also hear these cries, and got us our political rights?" (Applause)

"He has fought day and night to get us our true political rights. The untouchable who does not follow his call and convert is a *chaandaal*, a traitor and despicable. Dr. Babasaheb, we women request you to show us the religion in which we will have the chance to be brave mothers, brave sisters and brave wives. Saying this I give my support to the resolution." The expression 'brave mothers, brave sisters and brave wives' shows the women's desire to be treated with respect.

Supporting the resolution Mrs. Sonubai Daavare said, "We should only embrace a faith in which we have the right to be treated with humanity. It is not possible for us to have these rights in the Hindu religion. Dr. Ambedkar is fighting for the progress of seven crore (seventy million) untouchables; it is our duty to give him our support.

Without a religious revolution we have no hope. Hinduism at root is based on inequality. Why should we stay on in a religion that considers us lower than animals? So let us all give our support to this resolution."

Miss Bhagirathibai Tambe said, "Today we are all tired of the Hindu faith and we are giving it our last salute. Even so, the caste Hindus think that Ambedkar's declaration is empty boasting. On the day when Dr. Ambedkar in his wise words gave the call for religious conversion, that very day my brothers and sisters felt that the shackles on their feet had suddenly become lighter. We felt that the Almighty himself was speaking in Babasaheb's voice. This declaration has caused all caste Hindus and people of other faiths to wake up with a start. From Kanyakumari to the Himalayas our brethren of the untouchable community have felt a wave of hope leap within their hearts. They have called meetings and parishads and wholeheartedly supported this call. And this untouchable community of ours is ready to lay all its strength, fervour, sacrifice and courage at Dr. Babasaheb's feet. Caste Hindu society has no idea of this tremendous awakening of our people. Babasaheb's determination is our determination; our footsteps will follow his. Babasaheb, on behalf of all of us women, I support your declaration of change of faith in this new epoch you are bringing. But we must not be made to wear purdah (the veil) in that new religion. We will accept that religion which allows us to move freely in society like our brothers. Dr. Babasaheb should lead us into a faith where there is truth, equality and freedom, where there is valour but no cruelty, where there is discipline and no ritual traditions are held, where human life will become joyful; this is what I tell you from my heart."

Mrs. Anusuyabai Waval, supporting the resolution, said," Up to now we have been taking part in many meetings and conferences. For the last twenty years we have been firmly stepping out on the path of progress. From this conference a new responsibility has fallen on us. Because until now we were fighting with those who call themselves caste Hindus, against religious slavery. But the situation today is grave; so we must bring together all the manpower we can and unitedly proceed with caution. I also appeal to my sisters to be brave. The women in any reforming caste always follow in the men's footsteps to fight for freedom from the particular forms of slavery in their society. So we sisters

must dedicate ourselves to working according to Dr. Babasaheb's beliefs. From the last parishad at Yeole the sphere of our movement has been turned in a new direction. This direction is going to benefit us in the future. To tell the truth, if there is any obstacle in the way of human progress, that obstacle is religion. Because of religious and caste differences cruel wars have taken place in the world. Because we have, till today, been tied up in the slavery of the Hindu faith, our economic, political and religious freedom has been destroyed. If we stay within this faith that is the cause of our poverty, we will not be able to achieve anything. The class of caste Hindus appears to be distressed to hear this our declaration of change of faith. But we have no reason to concern ourselves with their condition. Why should we care about the condition of those caste Hindus who have separated us from our humanness? Our decision to change faith is not just a question of our liberation; the welfare of the nation is contained in it. So I think that conversion will give us freedom from our oppression and troubles."[7]

Thus the women were extremely conscious about the issue of conversion and they frankly expressed the hope that the freedom they enjoyed in dalit society would not come to an end after the change of faith.

The Victory of the Dhamma — 1956

After Babasaheb had announced his intention to change his religion at Yeole in the presence of ten thousand people, saying "although I was born a Hindu I will not die a Hindu," he made a comparative study of all religions from the point of view of conversion. He considered the matter of his conversion with a reflective and contemplative approach. Also, in order to prepare the untouchable community mentally for conversion, he set out his ideas in meetings and conferences.

Various people regarded Babasaheb's pledge to change faith from different viewpoints. The orthodox Hindus felt that if the untouchable people go to some other religion it will be a good thing; untouchability will be removed from our religion.

The Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others felt that if the

untouchables entered their faith the number of people in their religion would increase.

Hindu religious leaders tactically agreed to Ambedkar's conversion. But they expressed the opinion that he should accept neither Islam nor Christianity, but enter the Sikh faith together with his followers, and that the untouchables and the Sikhs should stand together against Muslims and thus help the Hindus. The high priest (Shankaracharya) of the Karveer Vidyapeeth and leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, Dr. Moonje, expounded this point of view.[3]

Babasaheb paid close attention to the flow of diverse opinions. The seventy million untouchable people were uppermost in his mind.

"Babasaheb, give us any faith but don't give us a religion that will make us wear purdah."[4] The untouchable women of Bombay had expressed their views thus, "Babasaheb, give us a religion that we can feel is ours. Give us a faith that will allow us to live as human beings." Babasaheb was fully aware that his people were crying thus from their hearts, and that he held their future in his hands.

He was contemplating all alternative religions from this point of view. He wanted a religion that would give freedom and brotherhood, and that was akin to the soil and culture of this country. He was convinced that Buddhism was such a religion.

He was not concerned about the division between the Hinayana and Mahayana sects because from his study of the subject, he was looking at the original Dhamma of Gautam Buddha. It was because of this that a full 21 years after he had first announced his intention to change his religion, he decided to take instruction in the Buddhist Dhamma. The Italian Bhikku Loknath had called on Ambedkar to revive the Buddhist faith in India.

At first they decided to hold the ceremony of conversion on the grounds of the Mahalaxmi racecourse in Bombay, but Bombay had no historical or cultural heritage of Buddhism to speak of. So, later, it was decided that since Nagpur is the birthplace and *karmabhoomi* of the Nagas, the tribe that is traditionally supposed

to have conserved the Buddhist faith, the *deeksha* or initiation ceremony should be held in Nagpur.

The day the ceremony was to take place was fixed as 14th October 1956. By a happy coincidence, the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's death or *parinirvana* too happened to be in the same year. The festival of Dassehra, celebrated by Hindus by a symbolic crossing of the boundary *(seemollanghan)* was on 14th October that year, and on that very day Dr. Ambedkar was preparing to step outside the boundary of the Hindu faith.

A steady stream of untouchable people from all corners of India, from the towns and the villages, was heading for Nagpur to witness the deeksha ceremony and to be initiated themselves. They were coming to the *deekshabhoomi* in Nagpur by any means they could find: by rail, by car, in goods trains and cargo lorries, by taxi and auto-rickshaw. Many set out on foot in the hot sun, carrying four days' supplies of bhakris in bundles, bearing their small children on their shoulders. The young and the old were descending on Nagpur in huge numbers.

An unwritten command was circulated that everyone must wear white for the initiation ceremony. People were buying white clothes in a festive mood. Many even sold or pawned their little bits of jewellery to buy white saris and dhotis.

The shops were so crowded with people wanting to buy new white clothes that they ran out of stocks. Many women could not get white saris, but this did not deter them. If saris were not available, white dhotis would do just as well. And several women arrived at the deekshabhoomi wearing white dhotis.

In the open grounds of the 14-acre ground of the Shraddhanand Peth in Nagpur, men and women volunteers spontaneously stationed themselves to direct the people gathering there. Some women set up stalls providing food and drink. There was a medical squad with doctors and nurses. Women took care of the arrangements for drinking water.

The persons on the dais constructed at the grounds included Mahasthaveer Chandramani, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Savita

Ambedkar, the secretary of the Mahabodhi society, Wali Singh, and Thero, a bhikku from Sarnath, as well as other prominent bhikkus from various parts of India like the Sangharatna from Sarnath, Pannatirus from Sanchi, Pannanand from Hubli.

At the start of the ceremony Miss Warale sang a welcome song in Marathi. After that, since that day was also the death anniversary of Babasaheb's father, everyone stood for a one-minute observation of silence in his memeory. Then Mahasthaveer Chandramani directed Babasaheb and Savita Ambedkar to pronounce the "Saranatay" and the "Panchasheel".

After Babasaheb himself had embraced the Buddhist faith the ceremony of giving deeksha to the entire gathering of persons was completed. Babasaheb stood up and oversaw the pronouncement of the Trisharan Panchasheel and the 22 pledges which he had written out in his own hand. The 22 pledges are:

1. I will not believe in the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh and I will not observe rituals in their honour or fast in their name.
2. I will not hold Rama and Krishna to be gods and will not fast in their name.
3. I will not hold Gauri, Ganapati and other Hindu gods to be gods and will not fast in their name.
4. I do not believe in incarnations of the gods.
5. I believe it to be a mischievous rumour that the Buddha is an incarnation of Vishnu and I condemn this idea.
6. I will not get Brahmins to conduct funeral rites.
7. I will not transgress the Buddhist faith in word or deed.
8. I will not carry out any rituals at the hands of Brahmins.
9. I consider Chaturvarnya and caste distinctions to be without basis.
10. I believe that all human beings are equal and I will try to treat all equally.
11. I will adopt the eightfold path of the Buddha in all my deeds.
12. I will obey the ten commandments of the Buddha.
13. I will treat all creatures with kindness and make friends with them.
14. I will not steal.

15. I will not commit adultery.
16. I will not tell lies.
17. I will not drink alcohol.
18. I will live my life according to the three principles of the Buddhist faith: *Pradnya, Sheel* and *Karuna*.
19. I renounce my old Hindu faith which is harmful to the development of humankind and which holds human beings to be base and unequal, and I embrace the Buddhist faith.
20. I am convinced that the Buddhist dhamma is the true religion.
21. I believe that I am undergoing a new birth.
22. I pledge that from now on I will behave according to the teachings of the Buddha.

On the next day Babasaheb delivered a speech explaining why he had embraced the Buddhist faith. On the 16th of October he went to Chandrapur to give the deeksha to hundreds of thousands of people. Women enthusiastically took part in all the ceremonies.

Babasaheb was reading out all the pledges without his glasses. This surprised many who were present, as it was widely known that Babasaheb's eyes were weak and that he could not read without spectacles. Yet he swore in all the initiates without his glasses, as if to demonstrate that he was not viewing these ceremonies through prejudiced eyes.

Babasaheb's objective in writing out the 22 pledges was that the people who were being initiated into Buddhism should understand in a simple manner what it meant to have become Buddhist, what their religious obligations now were, and what they would now have to give up. His intention was that people should, under oath, give up the religious customs and traditions which were rooted in their minds and in their very blood from the time when they were Hindus, and that they should be pure in their behaviour.

Babasaheb thus brought Buddhism, the faith that had been banished from these shores, back to India. After this there was a wave of conversions by people all over India.

Babasaheb was tired of being responsible for the future of sixty million people. Also his problem of pain in the knees increased.

Finally, having led his millions on to the path of progress, entrusting the task of future work to his faithful activists, he breathed his last.

After Babsaaheb's death Buddhist women all over picked up the torch of social and religious activity. Women's associations sprang up everywhere, from an all-India Buddhist Women's association to village-level societies. Some women became bhikkus and devoted all their time to public work.

The rites of birth, marriage and death began to be performed according to the Buddhist Dhamma. Women gave up their old names and took new names. Instead of Hindu names like Ganga, Bhagirathi, Lakshmi, Parvati etc., names from the Buddhist tradition like Sujata, Gautami, Mahamaya, Amrapali, Vaishali became common. Women gave up their rituals and fasts and embraced a new way of life.

The custom of giving girls to the god under the name of devadasis, muralis and jogtinis came to an end among neo-Buddhists after their conversion.

Just as the waters of many rivers, after they have flowed into the sea, are known as part of the sea alone, so the 53 sub-castes among the Mahaars were dissolved in the Buddhist faith and came to be known only as Buddhists.

Endnotes

1 *Janata*, 20th June 1936.
2 *Janata*, 4th July 1939.
3 Prabhakar Vaidya: p.50,51.
4 *Janata*, 2nd June 1936.

13

After the Conversion

Once Babasaheb's mortal remains had been consigned to the sacred fire, that same night Dadasaheb Gaikwad called a meeting of activists, where it was decided to hold an emergency conference of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation (AISCF) at Nashik. After the Nashik conference, a meeting of the executive committee of the AISCF was held on 31st December 1956 and 1st January 1957. Barrister Khobragade was in the chair, and besides Dadasaheb Gaikwad and R.N. Shivraj, representatives from all over India were present. It was decided to establish the Republican Party of India on Dussehra of the same year, according to Babasaheb's wishes. Also, an eleven-member presidium was formed to keep a control on the various organisations established by Babasaheb. Parliamentary general elections were due in March 1957, and the distribution of tickets for these elections was also completed at this meeting. The woman activist Shantabai Dani was present at this meeting.

In 1957, the AISCF, with the help of the Peasants' and Workers' Party, won 11 legislative assembly seats and 9 seats in parliament.

On 3rd October 1957, as previously decided, the dalit leaders dissolved the Scheduled Castes Federation and established the Republican Party of India. On 2nd October, the day before this meeting, a well-attended conference of dalit women from all over

India was held, with Shantabai Dani in the chair. Of the 600,000 persons present for this important gathering in Nagpur, 300,000 were women.

A 32-member Provisional General Council of the Republican Party was formed. It was decided that the council would formulate a party constitution, enrol members according to the constitution, and elect a president within one year. If the election did not take place, the council was to dissolve itself.

In the same conference, the Indian Samata Sainik Dal and the Buddhist Mahasabha were reconstituted and Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar was named president of the latter.

A somewhat sensational event took place at this conference.[1] A Buddhist woman named Shantabai came on to the stage and declared, "Now that we are Buddhist we will not wear the *mangalsutra*" (locket chain worn by Maharashtrian Hindu married women to signify their marital status), and cast off her mangalsutra. There was a heated discussion in response, but in the end her action, which was in effect a demand for equality between men and women, stood accepted by the assembly.

The establishment of the Republican Party, with the objective of providing political leadership to dalit Buddhists and of taking forward the dalit political movement, gave the dalit Buddhist community a sense of support.

Behind the capable leadership of N. Shivraj were dynamic activists like Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar, Dadasaheb Gaikwad, Barrister Khobragade, B.C. Kamble and millions of ordinary people who were ready to do any kind of work for the party. On the strength of the Dalit-Buddhist people's support, the elected M.P.s of the Republican Party were able to handle numerous issues concerning them, such as concessions and reservations, development of the dalits, teaching of Buddhism in schools and colleges, allotment of waste land to the landless, demands for rail routes in undeveloped regions, etc.[2]

The party leadership had vigorously taken up a programme of activity including propagating the Buddhist faith, demanding judicial inquiries in cases of injustice against Buddhists, punishing

the guilty in such cases, and above all, building up the mental preparedness to oppose oppression. They also erected monuments to Dr. Ambedkar, spread awareness about the concessions available to the dalits, demanded government holidays on the birth anniversaries of the Buddha and Ambedkar, and demanded a portion of the land in Nagpur where Ambedkar had undergone conversion for building Buddhist *vihaaras* and colleges.

Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar and Mukundrao Ambedkar also took up a programme of conversion of dalits to Buddhism. In the 13th lane of the Kamathipura area in Bombay, a number of waghyas and muralis and others embraced the Buddhist faith on 15th March 1959. Because of the conversions of 1956 and after, the number of Buddhists in Maharashtra increased substantially.[3]

According to the Census of 1951, there were 2487 Buddhists in Maharashtra. In 1961 the number had increased to 27,89,501.[4] Table 1, based on the 1961 census, indicates the increase in the number of Buddhists in various parts of Maharashtra.

Republican Party activists took up the task of religious conversion in addition to political and economic struggles. A wave of conversions to Buddhism by dalits engulfed the whole country, not just Maharashtra. Apart from the Mahaars, other untouchable castes such as Chabhars, Jaatavs, Valmiks(scavengers) etc., embraced the Buddhist Dhamma. If we review the Censuses of 1951 and 1961, we can see a clear picture of dalit conversions all over the country.[5]

While the Republican Party (RPI) was working in an organised fashion to carry out conversions to Buddhism and to bring forward demands for the overall development of the neo-Buddhists, the 3rd October 1958 deadline, set a year earlier, was crossed without the Council having drafted a constitution , enrolled subscribers, or having elected a president as decided. B.C. Kamble, contending that the Council had thus ceased to exist, called a rebellion against the council chairman, Shivraj and the secretary, Barrister Khobragade. This was the first attack on the party organisation. The Kamble-Aavale group held a conference in Nagpur on 14th May 1959 and established a distinct Republican Party, with Hardas

Table 1

Number of Buddhists in Maharashtra		
	1951	1961
Maharashtra State	2,487	2,789,501
Bombay Division	1,501	192,717
Thane	9	40,031
Colaba(M)	------	46,154
Ratnagiri	12	100,128
Nashik	12	110,844
Dhule(M)	------	30,988
Jalgaon	7	101,724
Pune division	95	404,619
Ahmednagar	17	50,977
Pune	95	128,150
Satara	1	97,881
Sangli(M)	------	56,303
Solapur(M)	------	61,613
Kolhapur	14	9,695
Aurangabad Division	19	131,416
Parbhani	22	
Beed(M)		21,739
Nanded		380,603
Osmanabad		91,986
Nagpur Division		
Buldhana	8	134,928
Akola	30	194,132
Amaravati(M)	176,061	
Yavatmal	25	96,908
Wardha	55	95,635
Nagpur	147	234,112
Bhandara(M)	214,784	
Chanda (Chandrapur)	416	147,861

Aavale as President and A.G. Pawar as secretary. Dadasaheb Gaikwad also joined this group. Dadasaheb Gaikwad's group split again in 1964, and R.D. Bhandare formed a new independent group. Later on, the Dadasaheb Gaikwad group was joined by R.S. Gavai. In

State	1951	1961
Jammu & Kashmir	------	48,360
Himachal Pradesh	2	6,308
Punjab	1,660	14,857
Delhi	503	5,466
Rajasthan	4,361	759
U.P.	3,220	12,893
Bihar	1,092	2,885
Assam	22,628	36,513
Gujarat	198	3,185
M.P.	2,291	1,13,365
Maharashtra	2,407	27,89,501
Mysore	1,707	9,770
Andhra Pradesh	230	6,753
Kerala	90	228
Madras	1,179	777
Bengal	31,665	1,12,258
Orissa	969	454

this way, after a series of intra-party conflicts, the party was broken into several fragments. And each group began to carry forward the Ambedkar movement according to its ideas.

Efforts were made to build up a movement of the landless in 1958-59, under Dadasaheb Gaikwad's leadership. Since agriculture is the chief means of livelihood in this country, the people must have land. However, the Indian government, which had resettled even the Razakars (the police of the Nizam State of Hyderabad), had done nothing for the landless of the region. The number of

landless in the Marathwada region was huge. There was a total of 3,532,400 acres of waste (uncultivated) land in the state. Taking up the demand that this land should be distributed to the landless, Dadasaheb Gaikwad, P.G. Roham and Shantabai Dani held meetings to build up a satyagraha movement with the slogan, 'Land to the tiller, land to the landless.' From the very old, to those with tiny infants in their arms, large numbers of women took part in the movement. They included Buddhist men and women and also adivasis and persons from the bahujan community. The movement was withdrawn after a compromise in October 1959.[6]

Satyagrahas of the landless had, in fact, been initiated during Babasaheb's lifetime, from 1953. The regional president of the Scheduled Castes Federation for Marathwada, B.S. More, had led a satyagraha of the landless on 16th, 17th and 18th October, 1953. A team consisting of the Maharashtra Pradesh secretary of the S.C.F., Shantabai Dani, together with the lawyer A.G. Pawar, Rambhau Balji Maaru and others, surveyed the situation in Marathwada and found it deplorable. The satyagrahis were being attacked; also, some persons in the pay of the Congress Party were trying to disrupt the satyagraha. A report of the survey of the oppression of the satyagrahis was sent to the district collector.[7]

Similarly, in the 1958 satyagraha, activists travelled all over the region to keep up the spirits of the satyagrahis. The government arrested several activists for breaking the law; B.S. More and hundreds of satyagrahis were sent to jail in Aurangabad.

Divisive politics within the Republican Party led to a neglect of the problems of the dalit Buddhist people after 1962. Dadasaheb Gaikwad and P.G. Roham once again took up these issues, making several demands to the government, such as land to the landless, educational facilities for the dalits, reservations for untouchables in government jobs, placing a portrait of Dr. Ambedkar in the house of Parliament, passing a minimum wage law, distribution of adequate food grains to the poor, control of price increases, economic improvements in slums, ending violence on dalits, giving protection to dalits under the anti-untouchability law, etc.[8]

Satyagrahas of the landless began anew in December 1964, with participation of huge numbers of men and women from Nashik, Marathwada and other places. Hundreds of thousands of Buddhist men and women courted arrest, so that the jails were full and the government had to confine them in state schools and colleges.

Elections were being held independently in the various groups of the Republican Party. In 1967, Ishwaribai, an activist from Andhra Pradesh was nominated member of the all-India Working Committee of the Khobragade faction of the party, and she carried out independent work for the party. Later, Shantabai Dani was elected member of the state legislative assembly in Maharashtra and R.S. Gavai became deputy speaker. Several dalit women, such as Tanabai Garude (Kamble group) and Shantabai Dani, Damayantibai Dongre (Deshbhratar) of the Khobragade group were active in party politics and even won positions in government. Harkabai Janabandhu worked as chairman of a committee in the Nagar Parishad at Pulgaon; and for the first time in its 104-year history, a Buddhist woman, Susheela Khobragade was elected to the Nagar Parishad. More recently, Damayantibai Deshbhratar became social welfare minister in the Maharashtra government, while Saroj Khaparde worked as Minister of Health in the Central Government. All this was a result of the political awakening among dalit women.

The RPI had split into a number of groups. But just as Chaandalika, when her mother smashed her mirror, could see only the face of Bhante Anand in every fragment of the mirror, so did these women see the Ambedkar movement in each of the splinters of the RPI. They kept on working for the movement, and are still doing so.

Later, issues of identity politics like putting up statues of Ambedkar, placing his portrait in offices, naming roads and universities after him, also became a part of the Ambedkar movement. The demand for giving Babasaheb Ambedkar's name to Marathwada University in Aurangabad became one such issue.

At the time there were two universities in Marathwada, one was the agricultural university at Parbhani and the other was at Aurangabad. Both were called Marathwada University. The Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Vasantdada Patil, was the chief guest. At a ceremony held at Aurangabad university on 20th March 1977 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Mahaad satyagraha an activist proposed that Babasaheb Ambedkar's name be given to the university. The Chief Minister agreed to the proposal and suggested that the University Senate should place this demand before the government. Accordingly, the University Senate unanimously passed a resolution demanding that the university be renamed and sent the resolution to the Government of Maharashtra for ratification. Meanwhile, Vasantdada Patil lost power and Sharad Pawar because the Chief Minister.

Sharad Pawar took up the reins of power and granted the demand of the Marathwada University Senate that Ambedkar's name be given to the University. As soon as this decision was relayed in the seven o'clock news bulletin, the first dalit colonies in Marathwada were set on fire. From that day on, as Marathwada burned there was a spate of attacks on dalits, and many dalit homes were burnt to the ground.

The Marathwada region had already been smouldering as a result of various movements like that for *Ek Gaon Ek Paanavtha* (one village, one watering-place), as well as, demands for reservations for dalits in education and in government posts, for scholarships for dalit students and so on put forward by the Dalit Panthers. The decision to rename the university was a spark that lit a huge fire. The blood of dalits was spilled.

The attackers of dalits wanted to know, "Do you want to turn our Marathwada into a Mahaarwada?" An educated Marathi lady said to everyone, "Our raja (C.M. Sharad Pawar) wants to give a Mahaar's name to our schools and says that we will have to put up photographs of that Mahaar." Thus it was the educated people who were responsible for telling the illiterate that a Mahaar's picture would now be on the degree certificate given by the university, and that they would be compelled to display this picture in their

homes. This stirred up emotions, and the atrocities kept increasing. Taking note of the violence, the government reconsidered its decision and it was suggested that the name be changed to the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University. But this did not satisfy the opponents of the re-naming. Attempts were made by various egalitarian organisations, the Dalit Panthers and the RPI to oppose the violence against dalits, but they were asked, "Why don't you give Ambedkar's name to Pune University or Bombay University?" Of course, there was no question of renaming those universities, as their senates had not made any such demand.

The violence continued. The re-naming of the university had become a question of dalit identity. It was decided that dalits from all over Maharashtra would come together for a 'long march'. Jogendra Kawaade from Nagpur led the march, and people assembled from every corner of Maharashtra. From western Maharashtra, Ramdas Athavale and Arun Kamble were among the leaders; they were joined by non-dalits such as Baba Aadhaav, Chhaya Datar, Neelam Gorhe etc. Women took part the march in thousands, some carrying their infants and small children. Many persons were injured, some had their arms and legs broken as a result of police beatings, many died in this Marathwada University renaming march. But the demand for re-naming was still not granted.

The renaming issue dragged on, with the government taking the stand that they would consider renaming only when peace had been established. Chief Ministers changed, the issue remained, but the demand lost force.

In an attempt to revive the movement for renaming, a conference was held in Bombay in August 1982. Dr. Ambedkar's widow Savita Ambedkar inaugurated the conference, which was followed by a satyagraha on 6th September. Several men and women courted arrest; the women were released immediately, but the men were detained for 15 days.

Later on, when Babasaheb Bhosle became C.M., he openly opposed the demand for renaming the university and a resolution which had earlier been passed unanimously by the Maharashtra

state legislative assembly was abrogated by the single vote of the chief minister.*

In this way the dalit movement carried on after Ambedkar, widening its path and, continuing the journey begun even before Ambedkar. It is important to understand the role that women played in this movement. Side by side with men, often carrying small children, they entered the struggle, not caring for the consequences. They carried Ambedkar's message into every dalit household through speeches and articles; they nurtured the movement, shaped it and made it grow. We can better understand what they went through, what difficulties they faced as women managing family responsibilities, how they were treated both within the home and outside it, and what transformations the movement brought into their lives, through the selected interviews that follow in Section II.

Endnotes

1 Personal account of A. G. Shinde, who was then president of the Scheduled Castes Federation, Ahmednagar District.
2 *Prabuddha Bhaarat*, 5th May 1959.
3 Kshirsagar, R.K., RPI publication.
4 Census of India, 1961: Paper no. 1 (Religion), Delhi, 1963.
5 Census of India, 1961.
6 *Prabuddha Bhaarat*, 30th March 1963 : articles by R.S. Gavai and D.M. Shirke.
7 *Janata*, 24th October 1953.
8 Bhaargave, Bhaavana (1968): *Padmashree Dadasaheb Gaikwad.*

* Translator's note: The Marathwada University was finally given the name "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University" on 14th January 1994, almost seventeen years after the demand had first been made, and granted in principle. This was termed a "name-expansion" rather than a re-naming. At the same time, a new university was established at Nanded with the name Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University partly in order to pacify the opponents of this change.

PART II

Interviews and Life Sketches

1

Ramabai Ambedkar
(Deceased)

There are some people who do not make much of their own deeds, but go on serving society diligently and selflessly. Matoshri Ramabai Bhimrao Ambedkar was one such worker. In fact she had no benefit of schooling, but with effort she learned to read, and when her husband was abroad she even wrote letters to him.

Ramabai was married to Dr. Ambedkar when she was still a child, probably nine or ten years old. Ramabai's name before her marriage was Raamibai. She was the daughter of Bhikubaba Valangkar, who lived at Dapoli and earned his living through wage labour. Later on, after he died, she was brought up by her maternal and paternal uncles. Her paternal uncle looked after several fatherless children.

The burden of running a home fell on Ramabai's shoulders when she was of a very tender age, but she faced up to a situation of extreme economic hardship with great courage and never let outsiders know the troubles of her household. Most of her life was spent in a *chawl,* and she always had to live a life of toil. Towards the end of her life she went to live at "Rajagruha" in Dadar. Although she thus enjoyed for a short period a more comfortable existence there, she was always drawn to her women friends in the chawl.

Ramabai was a close witness to the inspiring life of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. She understood the importance of his work, and she took up much of the burden, working as Babasaheb's partner in order to bring about the uplift of the untouchable class.

When Ambedkar had to find his way through endless difficulties, Ramabai's words of encouragement often served to steady him. She was always ready to give whatever help she could so that

Babasaheb could achieve his objectives, and to sacrifice her interests for these ends. She ran her household in a manner befitting the family's position in society, and it was in her nature to help others. When their economic situation improved, she served meals to eleven or twelve untouchable students in her home.

On 4th June 1920 Babasaheb went to London to complete his unfinished academic studies. The money he had left with Ramabai for household expenses was soon spent. Ramabai's brother, Bhau Shankarrao Dhutre, and her younger sister, Gaurabai, were both wage labourers. From the eight to ten annas that Shankarrao earned as his daily wage, Ramabai would buy food in the evening and cook a meal for everyone. Ramabai would make four bhakris; one for Mukund (Babasaheb's brother's son), the second for her son Yashwant, the third for Shankarrao, and the fourth was shared among the three women, Gaura, Lakshmi and Ramabai. Usually there was only chutney or onions to go with the bhakri.

Sometimes they would get to eat only in the evening, and that too, not enough. Ramabai practised the utmost frugality to run her household. To get cheap fuel for cooking, she would go out after dark, and, taking Yashwant with her, walk from Poybawadi as far as Dadar and Mahim. Carrying the load of firewood, the two would return by nine or ten at night. She went out after dark so that no one would see that 'Saheb's' wife had to carry firewood on her head. On the days when Shankarrao did not get work, Ramabai, Lakshmi and Gaura would go to Worli village at dawn and make cowdung cakes till 8 p.m. In these difficult circumstances, Ramabai managed to do the housework, work outside the home and also fit in a little study.

Ramabai's natural endurance and courage was remarkable. This courage was tested at the time of the Poona Pact with Mahatma Gandhi. While Dr. Ambedkar was engaged in negotiations with caste Hindu leaders regarding the Poona Pact, some caste Hindu ruffians lay in wait for Ramabai in order to harass her. They had planned to accost her when she left home to do her daily chores, and beat her up. But Ramabai did not allow these despicable schemes to affect her, and went on with her daily routine as usual.

Ramabai was fiercely independent and proud. When Dr. Ambedkar had gone abroad for higher studies, she did not mind making cowdung cakes in order to manage her household, but she never borrowed money, or borrowed a handful of flour from a neighbour's house. She was disciplined by nature and kept a well-run and orderly home.

Ramabai was ethical by nature and also liked to do social work, but she disliked publicity. She stayed with Balwantrao Warale in Dharwad for a couple of months in 1931 for health reasons. Her son, Yashwantrao and nephew Mukundrao had also gone there with her.

Mr. Hongal, chairman of the Leather-workers' Society of Dharwad, once invited Ramabai for tea. Ramabai, who was known to everyone as Aaisaheb, was reluctant to accept, as an invitation to tea did not fit into her old-fashioned upbringing in the Konkan. But she accepted in the end, thinking that her behaviour should not reflect badly on Babasaheb and his work.

Ramabai was a woman of religious persuasion. She practised penances and fasts to bring success to Babasaheb's work. She fasted every Monday and Saturday. When Babasaheb was in London, she would sit alone praying for hours on end.

Ramabai identified herself with her husband's activities, and having resolved that she too should carry forward his work of liberating his people, she was prepared to make any sacrifice that was called for. Recounting a telling anecdote about her socially oriented and unselfish nature, Warale says: "I was thinking about the economic problems of the boarding school. My worries showed on my face and my behaviour was also affected. Aaisaheb also noticed this, and asked my wife, 'Why is the master depressed?' My wife told her everything. Then Aaisaheb gave me a hundred rupees and told me, 'There is no reason to lose hope like this. Take this money for the present and buy grains for the boarders. Even after that, we can pledge my jewellery somewhere and raise whatever money you need. When Saheb returns he will, of course, redeem my jewels.' Saying this, she turned to her trunk to fetch her jewellery." Warale recalls that Aaisaheb's selfless, affectionate

and straightforward nature enchanted everyone in his family. "Selflessness was manifest in all her speech and actions. Among the activists she earned the role of a mother, a respected place in our hearts."[1] (Warale, p.45)

Her body worn away by great toil, Matoshri Ramabai took leave of this world on 27th May 1935. Not only Babasaheb Ambedkar himself, but the whole untouchable community felt a personal loss. Society benefited greatly from Ramabai's personal qualities and selflessness. Her chief virtues of endurance and unselfishness should be emulated by all.

Babasaheb was fully aware of Ramabai's limitless altruism, her unconditional love and her commitment. He writes in the dedication of his book *Thoughts on Pakistan*, written in 1945:

Inscribed to the Memory of Ramu....
As a token of my appreciation of her goodness of heart
Her nobility of mind, and her purity of character
And also for the cool fortitude and readiness to suffer along with me which she showed in those friendless days of want and worries which fell to our lot.[2]

Endnotes

1 Warale, B.H. (1989), Ambedkaranchi Sangari, Pune.
2 Dedication to *Thoughts on Pakistan*, author B.R.Ambedkar, original English from Ambedkar's book.

2
Radhabai Kamble
(Deceased)

You could not have found a single person living in the Sitabardi Anandnagar Colony (formerly Mahaarpura) in Nagpur who did not know Radhabai. That was because of her capacity to work and organise activists. Radhabai Kamble was a fearless and stirring

activist with a penetrating intelligence. Herself a mill worker, she was at the forefront in organising meetings, satyagrahas, conferences and demonstrations on mill workers' issues.

In 1929, the British Government sent a Labour Commission to India to carry out a survey of the situation of industrial workers. The Commission recorded testimonies of several political leaders in Bombay and Nagpur who were connected with the workers. On that occasion, among representatives of the mill and beedi-workers from the Nagpur region like Babu Hardas L.N., Raosaheb Thavre and Kallicharan Nandagavali, the testimony of Radhabai Kamble was also put on record. This shows that Radhabai was active in the workers' movement from an early date. For some time she was on the executive committee of the Nagpur Mill Workers' Union established under the leadership of Ruikar.

However, after a branch of the Independent Labour Party was set up with Raosaheb Phule as chairman, she worked for that organisation under Babasaheb's dynamic leadership. She was the first woman labour leader in Vidarbha to make fiery speeches to audiences numbering thousands.

Radhabai worked day and night to ensure the success of the 1942 conference of the Scheduled Castes Federation. She was the deputy chairperson of the Women's Welcome Committee for that conference, and later attended all meetings and gatherings of the Federation with other leaders, making speeches and doing propaganda.

In 1946 there were general elections. To prevent the untouchable candidate Sakharam Meshram from being elected by the dalit mill workers who were in a majority, Ruikar, the Rashtriya Mill Workers' Union candidate, purposely instigated a strike. His game was that the dalit workers should leave because of the strike and allow their candidate to be elected. To defeat this strategy, the Scheduled Castes Federation resolved to break the strike. The dalit labourers began to go back to work. The caste Hindu workers attacked them, and the dalit workers resisted collectively. Women workers were also attacked. At this point Radhabai Kamble assumed leadership and led the dalit women workers back to work.

She advised them to tuck a packet of chilly powder into the waist of their saris, to defend themselves and to deter the attackers.

An account of this strike appeared in the *Janata* weekly of 2nd February 1946. This news item throws light on the attacks on untouchable workers by caste Hindus and brings out Radhabai's role. It reads as follows: "When the untouchable people were going to work in groups on the morning of the 18th, Hindu hoodlums attacked them and threw stones on them. The hooligans beat up Laxman Narayane, municipality member, and his wife in the Itwara area. When Radhabai Kamble was going to work with a group of 10 to 15 women, they too were beaten up and subjected to abusive and filthy language. The police looked on passively. But Radhabai was not deterred and took all the women to the mill to work."

Radhabai Kamble was known for her speeches. While fighting against injustice she would spare no one and express her views in a forthright manner.

During the primary elections held in Bombay on 3rd January 1946, Chokhaji Gangurde was brutally murdered by Congress Party hoodlums. A huge rally was held at Kasturchand Park in Nagpur on 15th January 1946, under the chairmanship of Raosaheb Thavre, to condemn the murder. About 20,000 persons were present. On this occasion Radhabai Kamble spoke forcefully against the 'non-violent' hooliganism of Gandhi and the *lathi*-charge by the police.[1]

Radhabai Kamble also campaigned for elections on behalf of the Scheduled Castes Federation. Voting was to be held at the Bhide Girls' School. On the day of the election, Radhabai Kamble was prevented from casting her vote. However, soon after, Anusayabai Kale, a woman candidate from the Congress Party, was allowed to enter. When Radhabai saw Anusayabai drive up in her car and go in to vote, she was furious. She walked straight in, caught Anusayabai by the arm and dragged her out.

Radhabai received many invitations to give speeches because of her fearlessness and staunch convictions. She had no schooling beyond the third standard, but her speeches were inspiring and thought-provoking.

On 25th September 1946 a meeting was held in the evening in the satyagraha camp at Babhulkheda under the chairmanship of Rajbhoj. Radhabai Kamble made a most inspiring speech on the occasion. During the satyagraha, Radhabai would address the people every morning and evening, along with the other leaders. Also, she took care of the women taking part in the satyagraha. She made all the arrangements for the women who had come from far-off villages for the satyagraha.[2]

In 1949 there was a large-scale retrenchment of mill workers and the workers were faced with starvation. It was apparant that if the retrenchment continued, several families would be uprooted and their lives would be shattered. A demonstration of 100 women mill workers went to the secretariat in Nagpur to protest against the layoff of workers and to try and prevent further layoffs. Radhabai Kamble led the march. The Labour Secretary Mr. Bernhardt gave the women a patient hearing and assured them that the problems of the mill workers would be looked into. The retrenchments too were stopped immediately.[3]

Thus, it can truthfully be stated that this indomitable activist, Radhabai Kamble, was the first woman leader of the mill workers. Radhabai died in 1970.

Endnotes

1 *Janata*, 2nd February 1946.
2 *Janata*, 21st September 1946.
3 *Janata*, 5th November, 1949.

3

Jaibai Chaudhari
(Deceased)

Jaibai was born in 1890 to a Mahaar family in Umred, Nagpur district. In 1896 famine drove her family to Nagpur. As a child, Jaibai would go to gather sticks for firewood near the village

missionary school. Miss Gregory from the school asked her to come to school. From then on Jaibai would attend the school under the pretext of going out to gather firewood.

After five days Jai's mother realised that the girl was not bringing home fuel wood and she began to beat her. Once she put chilly powder in her bath water as a punishment. Her father too used to beat her; but this only increased her determination to go to school.

Miss Gregory not only helped Jai by giving her books and clothes but also met her parents and persuaded them to let her study. In this way Jai passed the 4th standard. Her father now decided that his daughter had had enough schooling and married her off to a man named Chaudhuri when she was eleven years old. At her in-laws' home she was ill treated; she had to work very hard and was given stale food to eat. This almost killed her enthusiasm for education. The same missionary lady tried to help her again by giving her husband a job as a *tonga* driver and attempting to convert him to Christianity. But he was not convinced and he would not let Jai go to school.

The couple was faced with starvation because of their poverty. Jai began to work at the railway station as a coolie. She would carry loads from Nagpur as far as Kamathi, and in this way earned a little money. After four or five years she gave up this occupation. She found a job as a teacher in a mission school in Timki on a salary of four rupees a month. But when the pupils in the school learnt that their teacher was a Mahaar, the children began to leave school. The school director dismissed her as he felt that children were being withdrawn from the school because of her.

After this incident Jai's determination to work as a teacher increased. She began to feel that she too should do something for poor untouchable girls. During this period she also began to attend meetings with Babasaheb and other leaders and to give speeches. As a result of this her husband and mother-in-law would often beat her.

At last, in 1924, she started a school called Chokhamela Kanyashaala in New Colony in Nagpur. She went from house to house to collect contributions for the school. She started teaching

in a small building and within four years the number of girls increased and a proper little school was built up.

In 1945 about 125 girls were studying in Jaibai's school. She had to attend to her housework as well as run the school. Soon the school had students up to matriculation. In 1945 Jaibai was a major activist of the Scheduled Castes Federation. She set an example to others in the way she overcame the most difficult circumstances.

Jaibai had two sons and a daughter. One of the boys died in childhood. Kusumavati Deshpande, a professor of English and a Marathi writer in Nagpur, has written a biography of Jaibai in the form of a story, published in a collection entitled *Moli* (Firewood).

In those days the winds of untouchability were very strong. Girls who wanted to go to school would have to stand outside the classroom and follow the lessons peering through the door or window. It was in such an atmosphere that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's speeches began to touch the hearts of the untouchable people and urge them to fight against their circumstances. Jaibai took Babasaheb's call to heart as a challenge. Seeing the poverty of the dalit community in which she was born and grew up, she did not weep or blame god or fortune. Rather she snatched the quill from the hand of the witch who writes the fates of men, and placed it in the hands of poor untouchable girls and women. She started her own school, and was its founder, director and guide.

Jaibai was a memorable presence in many meetings and gatherings. In men's meetings she would set out her views candidly and in women's meetings she would counsel the women on many subjects.

Jaibai was also a poet and she gave poetry readings on the radio. In 1960 the annual conference of the All-India Dalit Congress was held in Nagpur on 8th and 9th August. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar presided at the conference. A Dalit Women's conference was also held on this occasion, with Gunabai Gadekar as chairperson. Jaibai attended this conference.

On 18th, 19th and 20th July 1942, the third annual conference of the All-India Dalit Congress was held in Nagpur, and the first

annual conference of the All-India Dalit Mahila Congress was also held there on the 20th of July. Sulochanabai Dongre and Jaibai Chaudhuri were members of the Congress and they spoke on the resolutions of the conference.

An Untouchable Women's Conference was held in Nagpur on 1st January 1938. On that occasion Anjanabai Deshbhratar, who had attended the All-India Women's Congress during the Christmas holidays, recounted her experiences, saying, "Caste Hindu women's behaviour with their untouchable sisters is unfriendly and abrupt and demonstrates their despicable mental attitudes. During meals they asked Jaibai and other women from the untouchable community to sit some distance away and thus insulted our community by regarding them as polluting." A resolution condemning this behaviour in the strongest terms was passed at this meeting. A new association named the Shrimati Ramabai Ambedkar Society was also established.

The first conference of the Savner tehsil Untouchable Council was held on 31st January 1939 in the village of Dhorad, presided over by P.P. Bhajghate. Jaibai Chaudhuri was also present on the occassion. This conference had been organised for the purpose of exchanging views on issues concerning untouchables, workers, and farmers in the context of the Independent Labour Party newly established by Dr. Ambedkar.

In 1939 the secretary of the ILP, Revaram Kevade, launched a vigorous subscription drive to expand membership. It was necessary to bring together people of the toiling class under the leadership of the new party. When members from Nagpur were divided into groups and entrusted with the task of collecting subscriptions, Jaibai Chaudhuri and Lakshmibai Nandagavali were among them.

The Sant Chokhamela school started by Jaibai Chaudhuri has now become a college. It has been renamed Jaibai Chaudhuri College and is presently being run by her grandson and his wife. Jaibai passed away after a short illness in 1964.

4

Tulsabai Bansode
(Deceased)

The great Guru Kisan Phagoji Bansode, (one of the earliest dalit social reformers) and his wife lived their lives in the service of society, with the ideal of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule always before them.

Tulsabai was born in the village of Khairi near Nagpur. She was well-off in both her natal and marital homes, but since her husband was a social reformer, after their marriage he went to Pune and Mumbai to survey the social conditions there. He left Tulsabai in Paranjpe's ashram at Hanumangad in the town of Wardha. While living in the ashram Tulsabai learned to read and write, and also how to live an independent life.

Feeling that she too should do something useful, Tulsabai began to sing songs of prayer. She also learnt to set type in a printing press. Later on, she came in contact with Vitthal Ramji Shine, and with her husband she too took up the sacred task of teaching the people.

When Kisan Phagoji Bansode bought a hand press and started to publish a newspaper called *Chokhamela*, Tulsabai gave him valuable help in this work.

Tulsabai sometimes attended meetings and assemblies, something that not many women had a chance to do in those days. But by about 1920 Dr. Ambedkar's movement for the uplift of dalits had begun to take hold.

Kisan Phagoji Bansode composed songs and poems based on the conditions of the untouchables in those times.

O God, make me an animal or a bird
But don't make me a Mahaar

Contemporary newspapers report that Tulsabai was present at many meetings and assemblies. She had a liking for social work.

5

Anjanibai Deshbhratar (Deceased): born 1912

Anjanibai Deshbhratar and her husband Krishnarao Deshbhratar had established a boarding house for orphaned untouchable girls in Navi Shukrawari, Nagpur, in 1933. The couple ran the boarding house, named Chokhamela Hostel, for many years, through many ups and downs. Anjanibai herself worked as the hostel superintendent, and looked after all arrangements, including the girls' meals and their studies, with great care.

Anjanibai organised a conference of untouchable girl students from Central Provinces (Berar) in the Nagpur Cotton Market from 21st to 25th May 1936. Mrs. Yashodabai Dahat presided. In August 1936 Anjanibai was also working as a member in an association that helped in facilitating the marriage of reformist untouchables.

At the time there was no hostel for untouchable girls, nor indeed for orphaned girls anywhere in the Berar (Vidarbha) region, so the Deshbhratars undertook this difficult task and carried it through to the end. The hostel was started with only three girls but Anjanibai's determination, self-control, perseverance and hard work sustained the hostel so that today it has 200 girl students. Among the past students of this hostel are several graduates, doctors and college professors, as well as many good housewives. Thus the Desbhratar couple achieved a great deal in the social and cultural uplift of dalit girls.

This was a time when women were beginning to enter Ambedkar's liberation movement with great hope and enthusiasm. Anjanibai was a self-taught teacher, who later taught in the municipality school. She followed her husband's lead and plunged into social reform and religious activities.

Anjanibai went through difficult times, doing a schoolteacher's job, running the girls' hostel with resolution while looking after her own household. During her husband's terminal illness she had to take care of his diet and medication too. But she was never defeated by these burdens; rather she took inspiration from Babasaheb Ambedkar and widened the scope of her social reform activity, remaining vigorous and energetic to the end.[1]

Anjanibai and Radhabai Kamble were among several speakers at a public meeting held by the Untouchable Women's Reform Association at Imamwada on 26th April 1936. A resolution was passed to the effect that: "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is the true leader of the untouchable community, and we untouchable women will follow in his footsteps and undertake reforms; this is our resolve."

When Ambedkar's birthday was celebrated by an association at Paachpaavali, Anjanibai chaired the women's committee.

The hostel founded by Anjanibai and Krisnarao Deshbhratar later on closed down for a while but around 1952 it was re-started by Chandrabhaan Chavan, Prabhakar Jeevane, Vasant Moon and Keertibai Patil. The hostel is still functioning and stands proudly on North Ambahari Road in Nagpur.

Endnote

1 *Asmitadarsh*, Diwali issue 1981, article by Sugandha Shende.

6

Sulochanabai Dongre (Deceased)

Shrimati Sulochanabai Dongre was born into a wealthy family in a village called Naagapur in Yawatmal district on 6th November 1919. Her father Shri Bansode Patil was a respected resident of the village. He looked after his agricultural lands and

gave generous help to the poor and needy. People who were active in Babasaheb's movement would often visit his house. He too was an activist of the movement; and many meetings and discussions were held at his house: Sulochanabai witnessed all this from her childhood. Since there was no school in Naagapur, she went to stay with her maternal uncle, G.D. Borkar, in Indore for her early schooling. Since Borkar was a Brahmo Samaajist, Sulochanabai had the opportunity of interacting with the upper-class persons who visited him.

When she was in the 8th class at school, Sulochanabai was married to Sadashivrao Dongre, the eldest son of Chandrabhanji Dongre, the postmaster of Amaravati. After her marriage, she indicated to her father-in-law that she wished to study further. Since he was an educated man, he raised no objection. At the time, Sulochanabai's husband was studying in Fergusson College in Pune.

Sulochanabai completed her matriculation and went on to study further at Morris College in Nagpur, where she passed the Intermediate examination. During this period she worked for some time as Superintendent of the Depressed Classes Girls' Hostel newly opened in the Gokulpeth area of Nagpur. While managing the hostel she gave guidance to several girls striving to get an education, among whom was Sugandha Shende. She often helped untouchable girls with their day-to-day problems, and is still remembered by her students.

Since her husband and her father were both involved in Babasaheb's movement, Sulochnabai developed an interest in social work. She began to attend meetings, and even to give speeches on occasion.

Sulochanabai was good-looking and delicate in her appearance, and she dressed well. Her husband was a recruiting officer and his brother, Jairam Bansode, was active in the Samata Sainik Dal. She brought up two children, a boy and a girl, while doing social work, balancing her two responsibilities in an admirable fashion.

In Nagpur, she was often accompanied to meetings by Jaibai Chaudhari. She expressed her views clearly and firmly, and was

able to make an impression on audiences. Having a philanthropic, independent and dignified nature, Sulochanabai gained tremendous self-confidence after she entered Babasaheb's movement, and soon Baba himself heard about her.

She was asked to chair the Women's Conference of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942. She gave an inspiring speech before the 25000 women assembled from different parts of the country, in the presence of Babasaheb. Later, she was invited to speak at various places in Maharashtra. In those days, when dalit society was still very backward, Bai spoke of social renaissance. She attended the Women's Conference in Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh in 1944. Sulochanabai's life is an example of how dalit women, till then silent and helpless, were becoming articulate and able to hold large audiences with their speeches. This was the influence of Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Sulochanabai was completely dedicated to her work and when involved in any activity she did not care about her health. Warale writes about her thus: "Sulochanabai Dongre, chairperson of the Women's Conference of the Scheduled Castes Federation, was extremely co-operative and devoted to her duty. On the first day of the Conference, she stayed up all night with other women activists writing out the resolutions of the Women's Conference."

7

Bhikshuni Laxmibai Naik
(Deceased)

After the conversion of 1956 many people from the untouchable community embraced Buddhism. The religious fervour was so great that some turned their backs on all worldly pleasures and became *bhikhus,* devoting themselves to the service

of society. The bhikhus took up activities like explaining the philosophy of the new faith to people in simple language, carrying out Budddhist religious rites, and collecting subscriptions for the setting up of Buddha Vihaaras. While doing this the bhikhus took care that their conduct was pure, that they were free of obligations and that they could be a model for the Buddhist people. Women, no less than men, took part in all these activities.

We heard that Laxmibai Naik of Amaravati had become a *bhikshuni* and spent her life in serving society, and so we collected information about her.

Laxmibai was born in Bheemnagar in the city of Akola in 1911. Her father's name was Damaji Shirsat. Laxmibai was married in 1924 to a man named Sampatrao Naik. Before her marriage she had passed the VIIth standard examination, and afterwards she trained as a teacher. Kashitai Maandavdhare and Laxmibai Wankhede were with her in this course. Later, Laxmibai started her own school in Belpura in Amravati and also taught in the school. Belpura was then an extremely backward sector of the city, where dalits of the Mahaar, Maang, Bhangi, Chambhar Koli and Khatik Castes were the main residents.

Laxmibai and her husband were thus both founders of institutions. Her husband had set up a hostel named the Adarsh (ideal) Hostel. In those days running a hostel was no easy task.

Around 1921 Laxmibai established an Untouchable Women's Society. She would organise functions with untouchable and caste women taking part, in an effort to remove caste discrimination. An account of on y 1929. It was Laxmibai who had the sensible idea of sending the report of the meeting to the press.

When the Scheduled Castes Federation was established in 1942 Laxmibai went with her daughter to meet Babasaheb Ambedkar. Babasaheb asked her, "You are educated women. What work are you going to do in the future?"

Laxmibai immediately answered, "We will serve society." Baba was happy to hear this, but he had no time to continue the conversation on that occasion and he went away.

Laxmibai's place of social activity was Amravati. She had a passion for social service, not caring for the consequences for herself or for her children. Her husband Sampatrao was also a long-time follower of Ambedkar and an activist. In 1936 he was a member of the Legislative Council in the Central Provinces Assembly. The couple subscribed to the *Janata* weekly, and kept themselves informed about Babasaheb's work and the movement. Laxmibai enthusiastically followed her husband's example and regularly attended meetings, sometimes making speeches as well. This has been mentioned in *Janata*.

When Babasaheb converted to Buddhism on 14th October 1956, Laxmibai too was initiated into the Buddhist faith. After this she read through many books on Buddhism. Although she was working as a schoolteacher, reading and doing social work after she came home from school was an obsession with her. Her reading of Buddhist literature and her pursuit of its tenets filled her with new strength and inspiration, and she took to the path of spiritual uplift preaching Buddhism. She believed that only Buddhism would ultimately save the world. She was so impressed by the Buddha's teachings that she shaved her head, put on the white robes of a bhikshuni and began to travel through the villages as a Buddhist preacher.

Laxmibai was the first woman to take to the villages as a bhikshuni after the 1956 conversion. She went to Bodh Gaya and spent a year in the Buddhist vihaar to study the faith and to learn meditation. She undertook pilgrimages to Kushinagar, Bodh Gaya and other Buddhist holy places, and in Sarnath she took instruction as a bhikshuni from a holy *bhante*.

Laxmibai spent her earnings as a schoolteacher on helping the poor and to spread the faith. Sampatrao did not oppose her in this, but helped her. She began to spend three months every year in solitary meditation in a remote village named Kondeshwar near Badnera. Three kilometres from any human habitation this was the site of an ancient vihaar. This was now an essential part of her life; she had really become a bhikshuni.

On one occasion, cattle were dying in a village called Papad. Someone spread a rumour that a Buddhist man named Champat was casting a spell on them . Infuriated, the villagers took him to Kunbipura, hung him upside down and later paraded him through the village. When he was brought back to the village, he pleaded for mercy.

An atmosphere of fear pervaded the village. When Laxmibai heard about the incident she went to Papad at once, but at first no-one dared to tell her anything. The police were reluctant to entertain a complaint or to file a case against the Hindus. Laxmibai then took the initiative and made the D.S.P. register a case. Eventually, however, Champat himself withdrew the case because of pressure.

Laxmibai spent her life preaching, often visiting villages on foot. On one such visit in Aakot tehsil of Akola district, she finished her preaching and proceeded to Mundgaon. There she suffered an attack of sunstroke. The villagers looked after her, but she became unconscious. Her son, Manohar, was informed and she was taken to the Irwin Hospital in Amravati. She passed away on 29th June 1970. A bhikshuni of the new Buddhist community had left behind an ideal for the people.

8

Seetabai Gaikwad
(Deceased)

Geetabai, Seetabai and Ramabai were three sisters, daughters of Rakhmaji Bapurao Daani. The father had a little land as a *haadki haadawali* endowment (land which is traditionally used to slaughter sick animals or to clean the carcasses of dead cattle, etc. Such land is sometimes allotted to a Mahaar.) The family including

his wife, three daughters and two sons earned a meagre subsistence from this land.

Seetabai was the eldest daughter. She was married toBhourau Krishnarao Gaikwad in 1921, when she was just twelve years old. At the time of the marriage, Bhourao paid Seetabai's father one and a quarter anna as bride-price. It was a good match for although Seetabai had no education, her husband was a 'non-matriculate', which in those days meant that he had gone to school up to the eleventh standard. Also, it was a good family, with a large landholding. It was a big household, with several brothers and their wives and children.

Seetabai's husband Bhourao Gaikwad was a trusted activist working with Babasaheb. So there were always a coming and going of guests, and it fell to Seetabai to look after their needs, to and serve meals to them. She would get up at dawn and grind flour, then make the bhakris and vegetables, giving special care to each task. Besides this, she also worked in the movement with Bhourao, who was known in public as Dadasaheb. Fourteen years after their marriage the couple still had no child. The household lacked for nothing but Seetabai was distressed that she had not borne a child. Finally, in 1928, she got her own younger sister Geeta married to Dadasaheb and cheerfully accepted her into the household.

The middle sister Ramabai had meanwhile been married to Dadasaheb's brother Appasaheb. And so all three sisters began to live together happily in the same family.

All three sisters were interested in social activism. This was the time when women, dutifully standing by the men, took part in the Kaala Ram temple-entry of 1930. Seetabai was in the forefront of this movement. Dadasaheb's friend and co-workers N. Shivraj and Rajbhoj, and even Babasaheb himself, had great respect for her.

Seetabai was a wonderful cook. In those days Yashwantrao Chavan (Congress Party leader from Maharashtra) often visited Dadasaheb Gaikwad's home. Even though the two had different spheres of activity, they were good friends. Yashwantrao especially enjoyed eating brinjals with black masala and bhakri made by

Seetabai. He used to call her "Annapoorna"—the one who feeds people to satisfaction.

In 1946 Seetabai went to Pune to participate in a satyagraha along with Dadasaheb. She also took active part in the satyagrahas of the landless that he organised.

At the time of the partition of India in 1947, arrangements had been made to provide refugees and displaced persons with rations, clothes and food grains at Kurukshetra in north India. When Babasaheb pointed out to Nehru that untouchability was being practised there, he appointed Dadasaheb to look after the arrangements. Seetabai also followed, accompanied by Rajbhoj, and for some days she worked with people of the bhangi community. Together with the refugees, she too had to suffer caste prejudice. As a result, Dadasaheb resigned from the assignment on 23rd April (1948). Seetabai was sorry to leave the camp for the joy of serving the people and caring for them had made her forget the pains of untouchability.

9

Geetabai Gaikwad
(Deceased)

Geetabai also was a valuable companion to Dadasaheb Gaikwad in his social activity. She was his second wife. Geetabai was born in 1913, and was about fifteen when she married Dadasaheb. Like her sisters, she did not neglect her schooling and managed to complete her final school examinations.

Geetabai was married to Dadasaheb Gaikwad in 1928. She had heard about the Mahaad satyagraha, which took place a year before she was married. Since then she was motivated to take part in the Ambedkar movement. After her marriage, she was always with

Dadasaheb's co-activists, of course after having done her household duties.

Like her other sisters-in-law, Geetabai too was expected, according to the custom of the time, to grind grain on a stone mill, make bhakris, do the cooking, wash the clothes and pots, and clean the house. Most of the women had blisters on their palms from all the work. Geetabai too had such blisters, but her hands also held a pen and books. She was also an accomplished speaker.

A conference for women's education and social issues was held in Nagpur, presided over by Ramabai Tambe, director of the Women's College. A resolution on untouchability was moved at this meeting, and Geetabai spoke for the motion in a forthright manner.

Before this conference Geetabai had taken part in the Kaala Ram satyagraha of 1930. Dadasaheb had been arrested and imprisoned for defying the ban on temple entry, breaking the police cordon and pushing ahead. It was announced that whoever broke the rule after this would also be imprisoned. Geetabai, together with her sisters and sisters-in-law, was among the large numbers of women who defied this threat and were jailed. Geetabai was in prison for a month and a half.

In 1938 Geetabai was elected unopposed in the elections for the Nashik school board. Dadasaheb had to exert considerable effort to achieve this.

From 1947 onwards, Geetabai worked as superintendent of the Ramabai Boarding House, established that same year. The hostel had only twelve girls to begin with. This charge was a considerable responsibility, and so Geetabai could not take part in the satyagraha of the landless in 1947, although she had been jailed in the 1946 satyagraha on the Poona Pact.

For many years Geetabai was a member of the Nashik School Board and also of the Nashik Municipality. She was chairperson of the school committee.

After Dadasaheb's death, Geetabai ran several institutions, looked after court cases and other day-to-day problems of the people. She was a member of the Civil Hospital Committee, and

also an honorary Justice of the Peace. She handled these duties very ably.

Geetabai's fundamentally simple and straightforward personality developed many facets as she worked with Dadasaheb. Later, she earned people's respect because of her persistent and capable approach to social work. When she called for anyone she would be answered with a respectful "ji". Dadasaheb once teased her about this: 'In future I am going to address you as Ji Ji, because everyone shows you respect by saying "ji". Besides your name when written in English has the initials "G.G."'

From that day onwards, everybody, from the girls in the hostel to political activists and even Dadasaheb's friends , always addressed Geetabai as "Jiji". Anyone visiting the Ramabai Students' Hostel even today will be struck by the greatness of Geetabai's achievements.

The first satyagraha of the landless took place in 1958-59. Bhourao, or Dadasaheb Gaikwad, and B.S. More were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for four months. Geetabai went to visit them in the Paithan jail, where they were lodged. She took some roasted peanuts along for the men but when she was asked to spill them out in front of the magistrate, it turned out that there were messages concealed among the nuts. So she was detained by the police, and harassed for a considerable time.

When a site for the Ramabai hostel was acquired in 1958, Geetabai Gaikwad and Shantabai Daani were of great help when work on the building commenced.

Geetabai Gaikwad passed away on 28th June 1986, while she was still involved with the various projects she had set in motion after Dadasaheb's death.

10

Virendrabai Teerthankar
(Deceased)

Virendrabai Teerthankar was born in 1905 in the village of Sindevaahi in Chandrapur district. She passed the seventh standard in school and then took normal school training, in order to take up a job as teacher in a Nagpur Corporation school. She never married. Influenced by Dr. Ambedkar's movement, she began to take part in meetings and conferences. She started Mahila Mandals, or women's associations and awareness classes for women, to uplift them culturally and awaken them to Babasaheb's movement. She was accompanied by women like Jaibai Chaudhuri, Radhabai Kamble and Anjanabai Deshbhratar.

"Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is the only leader of the untouchable people and we untouchable women will follow in his footsteps and show what we can do, this is our only objective." This was the speech Virendrabai made as president of the Mahila Mandal at the programme organised in the Ambedkar birthday celebrations on 26th April 1937 at Bardi in Nagpur. She adopted her nephew, Srinivas Saaikhare, and niece, Anusuya Ramteke, helped them to complete their schooling and thus to become educated and independent.

Although she lost her father in childhood, Virendrabai persisted in going to school. All round her was a colony of mainly illiterate Mahaars. She would gather boys and girls from her colony and plant the seeds of a desire for education in their minds. Later, she began to spread the word about education and personal hygiene in other parts of the city also.

She dedicated her whole life to the Ambedkar movement. Virendrabai was a member of the Mahaanubhavi sect. This sect

among the Mahaars is characterised by the attention they pay to personal cleanliness, and also by their generations-old practice of writing out the Mahaanubhavi texts. This built up a living tradition of familiarity with good Marathi in their homes. When Virendrabai would enunciate clearly like a Brahmin woman, the illiterate Mahaar women around her would make fun of her, calling her a *"Baamani"*. In her personal habits too she was very like the Brahmin women. After the conversion of 1956 Virendrabai gave up her old sacred manuscripts.

Virendrabai was present at the Wardha district Untouchable Conference held under the chairmanship of Dasharath Patil in the village of Sindi near Nagpur. She made speeches of social awakening at several places. This finds mention in the *Janata* and other periodicals.

This exceptional woman, who lived her whole life only for the movement, passed away in 1965.

11

Ratibai Puranik
(Deceased)

A profile of the untouchable woman activist Ratibai Puranik has been published in *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*.

An unlettered woman, Ratibai was fond of reading and had also gained much wisdom from what she heard. It was largely through her efforts that the first "sisters of *Bahishkrut Bhaarat* conference" was organised. She worked for the wide distribution of *Bahishkrut Bhaarat, Braahmanetar, Vijayi Maraatha,* and other journals. She was also largely responsible for getting the industrialist and nationalist activist Jamnalal Bajaj to allow classes for untouchables to be held in his Laxmi Narayan temple. Ratibai

was widowed in 1911, after which she devoted her life to the movement. She died young, in her thirtieth year. Her death was a great blow to the untouchable community.[1]

Endnote

1. *Bahishkrut Bhaarat*, 1st February 1929.

12

Geetabai Pawar
(Age: 80)

We went to meet Geetabai at the Ahilyashram School in Pune. There were two small rooms behind the school. There was an old table placed near the front, and on it lay a small rusty tin trunk. This was Geetabai's household.

Geetabai greeted us with a welcoming smile. A small woman with a dark but attractive face, a little bent at the waist, her chest was heaving because of asthma. She spoke to us clearly with her toothless mouth enunciating good Pune Marathi. She was white-haired, thin, wearing a faded sari and blouse. We felt sad. This admirable woman who had spread the light of Baba's message to so many homes, was now, in the evening of her life, languishing forgotten in this unknown corner!

We announced the reason for our visit and Bai began to speak...

My maiden name was Geeta Shendge, now it is Geeta Damodar Pawar. Because my mother died, my father married again. I stayed at the Ahilyashram as my stepmother didn't treat me well. In 1932 I passed my final exams. After that I did a course in nursing at the Raja Dhanraj Girji Hospital in Solapur for two years, and then I had to return to Pune because my father fell ill. Again I was fed up

with my stepmother's treatment, and a friend named Madhale helped me to leave home. Her husband, Mr. Madhale, was secretary of the Ahilyashram and he gave me a job there as teacher, and also a place to stay. I completed the four-year teachers training course.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar would come to the Ahilyashram from time to time. I remember the day when I first saw Baba. My friend Madhale came running to my room and said, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is here, come quickly if you want to see him." I ran to the office and saw Baba from a distance. Later, there was a meeting. Then Madhale led me forward and it was I who garlanded Baba. I felt honoured.

Later Babasaheb said, " This girl is very bold, encourage her." This incident inspired me.

After this I collected some women and requested Baba that he speak to them. But Baba didn't have the time then.

Around this time, a good activist named Janardhan Ranpise was staying at the Ahilyashram. He and Babasaheb stirred up in us the urge to do something.

Together with Madhalebai, Mainabai and some other friends we started a Mahila Mandal in 1932. We began to visit dalit areas like Bheeempura and Kamathipura in the cantonment. Dr. Ambedkar used to tell women in the Mahila Mandals, "Give education to your children, observe cleanliness". We used to spread this message in the dalit colonies. We started a Mahila Mandal in the Range Hill area in Pune, really in all parts of Pune. The male activists there would help us.

Around this time I got a job in Bombay and had the chance to go there. Friends helped me to find a room, and I began to stay there. In those days, a woman living alone in a rented room was a target for people's criticism. I was harassed by local layabouts, but I did not allow it to bother me. Once when I came out of school I saw that a local *dada* was sitting outside in a tonga. I was afraid, but walked on. He followed me, and the mischievous lads who used to make fun of me, also ran away. When I reached my room I turned round to look but he had reversed his *tonga* and driven away.

From that day onward he would always bring his tonga to my school and wait for me, then come as far as my room. I was afraid. What what if he suddenly gets ideas? ... But...

Once my cousin, who lived in the neighbourhood, came to visit me and I told her the story of the dada. She began to laugh.

"Why do you laugh?" I asked. Laughing, she answered me, "That man is my husband." I felt bad that I had not recognised my cousin's husband nor had he shown any signs of knowing me, but also that he offered me this kind of help when I did not need it.

I worked in Bombay for four years. I carried on the work of organising women that I had started in Pune.

In 1942 a meeting was held with Babasaheb Ambedkar presiding. We women had dressed up to attend. The other women urged me to invite him to take the chair. I requested Baba to do so.

In his speech Babasaheb said, "It makes me happy to see my sisters so neatly dressed. Who will say that they are Mahaarnis?" As he spoke, Baba's eyes filled with tears. We women also started to cry. " Always keep neat and clean like this, teach your daughters." This advice of Babasaheb, his words, were etched on my heart.

Around 1942, after the World War started, I lost my job and returned to Pune. Through Madhale I was introduced to Damodar Pawar. He was a social activist. He was already married, had a wife and two children. In those days there was no law against bigamy. Pawar expressed a desire to marry me. I too was alone, and agreed. I thought that only a man who was a social activist would understand me.

My co-wife was much younger than me. The responsibility of looking after her and her two children fell to me. I felt that it would be troublesome if I too bore children, and so I used to take birth control pills.

I myself liked to attend meetings and conferences, I liked to speak. Once, while I was studying at the Seva Sadan, Vitthal Ramji Shinde (the famous non-Brahmin social reformer) came there as president of a function. Some of the boy students made speeches. Shinde said, "The girls should also speak." No girl dared

to come forward to speak. Then Vitthal Ramji Shinde announced, " If any girl comes on to the stage to speak I will give her one rupee." The other girls pressed me to go up and speak. A Parsi lady who was sitting there, Alubai Driver, said, "Get up. Go there and say something, you will save face for all of us." Urged by her, I got up suddenly, went on to the stage and started to speak. I didn't quite know what I was saying, but I could hear the sound of clapping. Shinde patted me on the back and held up a rupee which he gave me.

I began to take part in the inter-caste common meals organised by Vitthal Ramji Shinde, together with his family members. They too ate the food I brought with enjoyment. In this way I was impressed by the speeches of Vitthal Ramji Shinde and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The social activist in me was taking shape.

Later, the activsts of the Maatang community developed the mistaken idea that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a leader of the Mahaars only. The dispute between Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi over the Poona Pact was taken in the wrong way by the Maatangs. The activists of the Maatang community had long been followers of Gandhi, now they broke away from Babasaheb's movement and began to work separately. I was an educated activist of the Maatang community, used to speaking in public meetings. I believed in Ambedkar's movement and in his leadership. I had the desire to do work. But it was not possible for me to go against the mainstream.

While I was a schoolteacher in Baramati, I experienced the worst forms of casteism. Even my snot-nosed pupils would write in big letters on the blackboard, "Geetabai Pawar Maang". But my husband used to read them religious texts that the people liked.

I also worked as a schoolteacher. The Ambedkarite activist Hanmantrao Warale helped me to get a job there. Members of the municipal council there strongly opposed my appointment, but Warale took issue with them, and in the end they had to take me on.

In the patriarchal society of India, parents have always discriminated between their sons and daughters. It was through

my own determination that I got an education, there was no question of my father educating me. However, I educated my children up to the Secondary School Certificate (matriculation).

As I lived in the ashram in my childhood and entered social work later on, I never had much acquaintance with the kitchen stove. The stove never held any attraction for me. The stove is an obstacle in the way of a woman's social activity, everyone in her family should help her to overcome it.

The Buddhist community has been able to make progress because of the conversion, but the Maatang community has not been able to do the same. They had the unwavering leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, we did not have the same leadership and guidance. I feel sorry even today that we have not been able to make progress like them.

13

Meenambal Shivraj

Shri Raobahadur N. Shivraj and his wife Srimati Meenambal Shivraj were a couple who dedicated their lives to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement in Madras province. They spread word of his work and about the Buddhist faith with great devotion.

Meenambal was born on 26th December 1902 in Rangoon, Burma (Yangon, Myanmar). She was married on 10th July 1918. She was from a rich family. Her grandfather, Rao Bahadur Pillai was B.A., L.L.B and a Member of Parliament. He was also an educationist. He started the Madurai Pillai High School at Rangoon, and that was Meenambal's first school. Her mother's name was Madurai Meenakshi.

Meenambal had done her B.A. which was rare in those days. She had two sons and two daughters. N. Shivraj was mayor of the

Madras Municipality, and after him Meenambal too held this post. The couple were both devoted followers of Babasaheb. They worked hard to build the Scheduled Castes Federation in Madras Presidency, and to spread Ambedkar's thoughts among the people. Meenambal's father, V.G. Vasudeorao Pillai, B.A., was a member of the Madras Municipal Council, and also a member of the Madras University Senate.

While Dr. Ambedkar was still living, N.Shivraj was offered a place in the central government cabinet, and C.Rajagopalachari also promised him a ministry in the Madras government. But Mr. And Mrs. Shivraj considered these offers and decided not to break faith with Ambedkar. Accordingly, N.Shivraj remained President of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation till the end, and the husband and wife did not waver in their devotion to Babasaheb. Meenambal was largely responsible for this.

Meenambal Shivraj was designated Chairperson of the 1942 Women's Conference of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, held at Nagpur. However, she was unable to remain present because of ill health. She was chairperson of the Working Women's Conference in the Scheduled Castes Federation congregation held in Madras on 23rd September 1944. N. Shivraj was chairman, and Dr. Ambedkar was also present on the occasion.

Meenambal Shivraj made all the arrangements for this meeting, especially looking after delegates and ensuring that the proceedings were well conduced. The following subjects were discussed : (1) the demand made by the untouchables for autonomy and citizenship and (2)the nature of protective legislation for untouchable communities in the future constitution of India.

Meenambal Shivraj was president of the Women's Conference in the All India Scheduled Castes Federation Conference held in Coimbatore from 23rd to 29th December 1944. On this occasion, with the help of N.Shivraj and E. Bedapalli, she founded the Madras and Andhra Pradesh branches of the Scheduled Castes Federation. She brought the Christian dalits of Madras Presidency under the banner of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation.

An account of the All India Untouchable Women's Conference

held in Bombay in 1945, with Meenambal Shivraj presiding, has been given in the first part of this book.

A conference of the Republican Party of India was held in Madras on 28th May 1960. An important resolution to launch a struggle of landless labourers was passed at this meeting. Meenambal Shivraj was responsible for looking after leaders who were attending the conference from all over the country, and she also made an effective speech before the assembly.

Meenambal Shivraj's work as a social organiser was indeed impressive; but she was also a powerful and inspiring speaker. The relationship between parents and children was one of her favourite subjects. She visited the Chokhamela Boarding House at Chandrapur in March 1947 where she was welcomed by hundreds of men and women. She spoke in English, advising the audience that " without education we will never make progress". Her speech was translated into Marathi by Kausalya Nandeshwar.

Even today (at the time of writing this book), Meenambal Shivraj speaks on Ambedkar's movement, his thought and on the Buddhist faith. Her work of social organisation thus continues.

The government of Tamil Nadu has named three colonies in the city of Madras after Meenambal Shivraj.

14

Mukta Sarvagaud
(Age: 70)

Having heard about Mukta Sarvagaud's autobiography, Mitleli *Kavaade (Closed Shutters) at several dalit literary gatherings, I read it and found that it reflected the mind of an activist more than that of a writer. Rather than writing about her own life, Muktabai has drawn a picture of the society around her. This*

depiction throws light on the Ambedkar movement, the work done by the Congress for the liberation of the dalits, and on activists of both the movements, etc. We interviewed Muktabai who is an exemplary social worker herself.

My name is Mukta Sarvagaud. I was born in Solapur in 1922. My maiden name was Mukta Sheku Salve. My father was a driver of passenger trains in the Railways, earning a good salary. We were relatively much better off than many others. My father retired in 1941.

In those days the fee for the vernacular final examination was only three rupees. The children around us found it difficult to pay even this. My father would pay the fees for such children. Our neighbours were ordinary railway servants like stokers, water-fillers, porters, *petiwalas*, battery men etc. They all respected my father. They would have discussions on subjects like Babasaheb Ambedkar, his speeches etc. There was a lot of talk about the need to give up traditional village service (*balutedaari, mahaarki*) and to give up eating the flesh of carcasses.

Whenever we had guests, my father would ask, "In which villages have (our people) stopped the work of hauling away dead animals? In which ones have they not? Who in the village ate (dead meat)?" Babasaheb's message that we should not eat dead flesh was, in those days, conveyed to the people through song troupes and *tamashas*. Those who ate it would be boycotted by their caste brethren. The movement to give up the Mahaar *watan* (traditional duties of village service, including the disposing of carcasses and carrying messages especially the news of deaths and inauspicious events, in return for which the Mahaar was allowed rights over a plot of land) was in full swing.

My father used to lend people money, which was often not returned. He would get newspapers at home. All day long there would be discussions and a kettle of tea on the stove. Beedis and matches were also supplied by us. This was the atmosphere in which I spent my childhood. I never gave much importance to going to the movies or plays or dressing-up.

My father was very encouraging about education in our home. In those days the urge for schooling was as intense among Mahaars as among the Brahmins.

I would go to listen to Babasaheb's speeches as a child. When Babasaheb was to speak at a meeting some reactionary caste Hindus would place obstacles in the road in order stop some vehicles. But this did not last long. Later on some Brahmins having absorbed liberal ideas through contact with the British, lent their cars and spent money when Babasaheb was to hold his meetings. People would come from surrounding villages carrying four days' supplies of bhakris, stopping in the shade of trees, to listen to Babasaheb's speeches.

There was a huge conference of Mahaar railway workers in Manmaad in 1938, with an open session for women. I was then in the fifth standard. I had been so shaped by the atmosphere around me that I purposely went from Daund to Manmaad to attend the women's session. I made a speech there.

Babasaheb in a speech at the women's assembly, talked about the importance of education for women. The speeches at this gathering were published in *Janata*.

I was never told at home that I should not do this or that because I was a girl. At this time I was the only Mahaar girl taking part in the activities of the Scouts Association. I would wear boys' clothes and mix with Brahmin girls. Because we were economically well off, my friends and companions, even in those days, were mainly girls from the upper classes.

However, even those days I was more drawn to my own community and its poverty. I would go to the slums and speak earnestly about reforms. I would always make speeches on occasions like marriages and naming ceremonies.

I grew up in a free atmosphere at home. I would practise stick wielding, *lezim*, parades etc., in the company of boys. In this way, under the fond eyes of my elders and with full freedom, I studied up to S.S.C. After this I got married. My husband was a police inspector. My father-in-law, Chaangdeo Sarvagaud, was a worker in the Solapur Mill. Besides this, he had some farmland. So

economically we were well off. At home everyone was illiterate, only my husband was educated. We had servants at home, so I had a lot of spare time. I felt that I should do something with my time. I accompanied my husband when he was transferred to Paatan, Bombay, Pune, Solapur and other places.

In those days there was a great awakening because of Babasaheb Ambedkar's newspaper *Bahiskrut Bhaarat,* his satyagrahas, campaign tours and speeches. Girls had begun to take an interest in education. The names of women who had passed the vernacular examination and, who had become teachers etc., were on everyone's lips. Educated girls were treated well by their in-laws. If anything, there would be some trouble for another reason: the mother-in-law might feel jealous at having to share her son's love.

I travelled to many places and many cities with my husband. In the afternoon, when my husband was in the office and my children at school, I did not waste time sleeping or chatting with neighbours. Instead, I would walk around the neighbouring slums and B.D.D. chawls[1] in Bombay. There I would try and organise the women.

While I was in Bombay I organised innumerable meetings and gatherings and gave many speeches. In Bombay, Naigaon, Worli, De Lisle Road were the centres of the Ambedkar movement. It was in these parts of Bombay that there would be rioting by caste Hindus against the untouchables. When there were elections our people were prevented from reaching the polling booths so that our candidates would not be elected to the reserved seats. The Congress party, would hire hoodlums to disrupt our meetings. Stone-throwing and fights were common.

Any illiterate person from the Chambhar or Maang (non-Mahaar dalit) castes would be put up as a rival to our candidate and the Congresswallahs would elect him by a vast majority. It was in this type of election that Babasaheb had been defeated.

When I went around the chawls of Bombay, I found that the rivalry between untouchables of the Konkan region and those of the *dakkhan* (Deccan Plateau, or interior) was at its height. The Konkanis felt that Babasaheb belonged to them because he was

from the Konkan, and that the *dakkhanis* had no claim over him. Each side would try and upstage the other.

The poverty in the chawls was heart-rending. Promising young men struck down by tuberculosis, alcoholic husbands who destroyed their households, women who scraped a living by selling old bottles, who hardly had clothes to cover themselves; these sights caused me pain.

The third conference of the All-India Dalit Women's Council was held in Bombay on 6th May 1945. At that time I spoke about the importance of education and about equality between men and women. Meenambal Shivraj was also present. Sarojini Jadhav was the Chairperson of the conference. On 14th July 1945 we organised a meeting of untouchable women in Dadar and Naigaon. In this meeting we women spoke on women's organisations, childcare and other topics.[2] Manjulabai Newalkar was chairperson. The main women activists from different parts of Bombay were present.

Around 1945 I also had the opportunity to see Mahatma Gandhi and speak to him. In those days the newspapers carried news of Gandhiji's prayer meetings under the head Birla House. Determined to see this collective prayer meeting and Gandhiji, I reached Birla House on Malabar Hill.

Gandhiji was sitting on a table with his legs folded under him. There was a simple bamboo platform behind the table, where Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Jivraj Mehta were standing. I went forward and, before anyone noticed, bent down from under the platform and touched Gandhiji's feet. "I don't just want your autograph, I want your guidance." Saying this, I placed a photograph of Gandhiji working the spinning wheel before him.

Gandhiji asked me in Hindi, "Have you given five rupees?" I said yes. After this I received the counsel, " The best thing for Harijans is that they should become the best!"

Plucking up my courage I asked Gandhiji, " Why do you not entrust the funds of the Harijan Sevak Sangh to Harijans?"

Gandhiji answered, " We have committed the sin of calling Harijans untouchable and keeping them at a distance. Caste Hindus

have done this. So the attempt is being made to wash it out by their hands."

I asked a second question, " What is your opinion about Ambedkar?"

"He is a scholar."

"What, is he not a leader?" At this question from me, Gandhiji only smiled.

"May I ask another question? Why do you hold collective prayers?"

"Prayers give one joy...everyone should get that joy... so that everyone can share in that joy."

The news that I had met Gandhiji and asked him questions reached Babasaheb. People complained that this woman is a Congresswaali. But Babasaheb himself explained to those who complained that she went out of curiosity. Babasaheb also said that he thought the woman to be intelligent.[3]

During Harijan Week there were many programmes everywhere. I spoke at those functions.

After Bombay we were transferred to Aundh. Aundh was a princely state. There the prince of the state, Appasaheb Pant's father, once came to visit us. A friendship grew between our families. The boundaries of caste were wiped away.

However, we suffered caste discrimination in Walve village in Islampur taluka. The children in the school would taunt my children by shouting, "Mhaar, Mhaar". We would not get maidservants from other castes. Our relative affluence was an eyesore to some.

When we were in Satara we came to know Bhaurao Patil. He encouraged me to pursue my education. I was already a matriculate pass. With his encouragement I did my teacher's diploma.

Around 1956 we were in Pune. At this time we experienced joy and limitless sorrow at two events: Babasaheb's religious conversion and his Mahaparinirvana (death). And after this there were efforts all over to start Women's Associations, to erect statues of Babasaheb, to celebrate Ambedkar's birthday, and the Buddha's birthday and to carry out conversions to Buddhism.

A statue of Ambedkar was set up in Rasta Peth in Pune. I was in the chair on that occasion. I did not believe that the Women's Associations should confine themselves to holding Buddhist prayer meetings, birthday celebrations and haldi–kunku functions. I would advise people in my speeches on how to secure benefits from the various welfare schemes of the government, and also act on this.

In order that ignorant unlettered women should get some employment, I started a programme to fashion dinner-bowls *(dronas)* from leaves; but nobody was willing to use bowls made by Harijan women. So that effort was wasted. Some two hundred and fifty rupees and our labour went in vain. We had to throw 80,000 bowls into the garbage can.

We also started kindergartens. We made free milk available to the children. Ganj Peth in Pune was renamed Mahatma Phule Peth. A library in a slum near there was inaugurated by me. I established 19 Women's Associations in Bombay.

I had a somewhat different way of working with the women's associations. We would make sudden visits to women's homes. If we found the house was clean we would reward the woman with a utensil as prize. If she had a large family we would all sit down with her and help her in cleaning vegetables, rice, etc. Thus the bonds of affection among us would grow. In my women's association in Pune, Saarja Bhalerao, Shevanta Jadhav, Muktabai Jaavale, Avantika Jagtap were members.

While I was in Pune Baburao Sanas offered me membership of the State Legislative Assembly on a reserved seat; but I did not accept. From 1951 to 1965 I was honorary organiser of the Bharat Sevak Sangh.

Nobody from my natal or marital families raised any objection to my activities. In our community also my work was appreciated. But the petty politicians in our lane were afraid of me. Then they would spread false rumours about me, that I had been given money by the Congress to sow dissidence, etc.

I never bore allegiance to any single political party. I would seek out people from the Congress, the Socialists, Communists, educated and uneducated, and cultivate my acquaintance with

them. I would attend their programmes. However I was most drawn to the Ambedkar movement.

I would have to go out of my home to carry on my social work. We had servants, but my husband was not able to help me with the housework, because in the police department one has to work 24 hours a day.

I educated my children well. I have one daughter and two sons. I never discriminated between the boys and the girl. My children received higher education and are working in good posts. My husband's sisters were illiterate but their children are graduates. Because of the movement I gained a lot of experience. I gained the capacity to think and understand different points of view. I became more tolerant. It became my nature always to take on new challenges. Because of this I am now looking after the afflicted in Baba Amte's Leprosy Colony. I am the *sarpanch* (head of the village-level elected body) here. I am satisfied with my life.

So that our caste should not be isolated we must become tolerant and understanding. We should mix with each other. We should not behave in a manner that causes conflict. This kind of behaviour causes us to be cast out socially, that is what I want to say.

Endnotes

1. The Bombay Development Directorate(BDD) was established in the year 1918. It was one of the earliest attempts to improve industrial housing in the city. These chawls were built in various places Worli, Naigaon, Sewri, de Lisle Road etc. Built during 1923-29 the BDD chawls at Worli were the centre of the Dalit Panther Movement in the 1970s and anti-Dalit riots also took place there.
2. *Janata:* 21 July 1945.
3. Sarvagaud, Mukta: *Mitleli Kavaade,* Chetashree Publications, Amalner, p. 108,110.

15

Shantabai Bhalerao
(Age: 75)

When we visited Shantabai at her residence in Chembur in Bombay, she was weak and ill in bed, having just undergone an operation. Her pale and rather sad face brightened when we introduced ourselves. However, we felt that she needed rest and that this introduction was enough for the day.

When we returned to see her a month later she was moving around the house, and quite animated at the thought of talking about her social activities.

She sat before us and began to speak.

My married name is Shanta Govind Bhalerao. My parents' home was in Ahmednagar. My home after marriage was Adgaon in Nashik district.

My father, Dagduji Bhivaji Shinde, was a close associate of Babasaheb. He was in the forefront of the Chavdaar lake satyagraha in Mahaad. He took me along. I was thirteen years old at the time, studying in the seventh class at school.

I had learned my first lessons in social activism from my father at an early age. At the time of the satyagraha, the Collector sahib called Babasaheb and told him that it was being claimed in court that the Chavdaar lake was private property, and so he should call off the satyagraha until a verdict was given.

When Babasaheb repeated this to the satyagrahis, the people who had come from far away were incensed, and they raised one voice: We will hold the satyagraha. A meeting was held. My father wrote out a speech for me on a piece of paper. An activist named Krishnaji Daavne made a speech declaring that all the people were

determined to carry on the satyagraha. After him, I was made to stand up on the table. Clutching the folds of my nine-yard sari in one hand and the written-out speech in the other, I read the paper and firmly announced that the satyagraha would go on. I received everybody's appreciation. The fact that I took part in the Mahaad satyagraha, and made a speech there, was one of the happiest moments of my life and it set me on the path of social activism.

Of course I know now what the burning of the *Manusmruti* signifies, but at the time I had only a vague understanding that we were to burn some religious book. That is because this was what people around me were saying at the time. Since I was always at my father's side, I went along with him when the plan to burn the *Manusmruti* in public was carried out. A man got up and made a fervent speech and everybody applauded. People cheered for Babasaheb and burned copies of the book. When we returned to Bombay later, everyone was full of approbation.

My father worked as driver to the Governor-General, Lord Montague-Chelmsford. The salary was good. So our circumstances at home were comfortable. We were a family of four sisters and one brother. We spent our childhood in the Lokhandi Chawl in Madanpura in Bombay. I went to school on Foras Road. When I was in the fifth standard, I won a gold medal for an essay on Dadabhai Naoroji. My father often had to drive Montagu-Chelmsford Saheb to the hill resort of Mahabaleshwar. My grandmother, a widow, would look after us then. My father had set up a *paan* shop for her in Madanpura.

My father was an activist with Dr. Ambedkar. So too were his friends, Mr. Dolas and Mr. David. All of them had plenty of money and plenty of courage. They were able to give financial support to the movement, which gave them a position of importance. Earlier, my father would organise *bhandaras* to feed the poor.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's brother-in-law, that is, Ramabai's brother Shankarrao Dhotre lived in Bhoiwada nearby. I visited them often, and for some years I stayed with Ramabai.

Babasaheb had affection for me; but what Khairmode has written

about me is one-sided and mischievous. It is easy to mar a woman's reputation.

When Gandhiji launched the Quit India movement in 1942, I too took part. We satyagrahis were guided by Maniben, Tara, Aruna Asaf Ali and Bhanushankar Yagnik. We would carry secret messages, burn post offices and police *chowkies*. I was pregnant at the time, but still I went to jail for two months during the Gowalia Tank riots. In prison we would sing songs:

Spinning the charkha,
We will take our freedom!

I was in the Arthur Road jail. We were treated fairly well. The coarse bhakris however were hard to swallow.

In Gandhiji's Quit India movement violence was sometimes used as well as non-violent means of struggle. Even though Gandhiji was opposed to this, we activists sometimes indulged in arson and stone-throwing.

However, when I worked in Babasaheb's movement,[1] I realise that we activists never took up violent action from our side. However much the caste Hindus beat us up, we would suffer without retaliation as far as possible. These were Babasaheb's instructions; and so the principle of non-violence was followed quite diligently by his activists.

I was married when I was seventeen. My husband was a contractor, but I did not get on with him. Because of my social work I could not give much time to running the household. This was the main cause of dispute between us; he wanted a wife who would only be a housewife. After I passed the seventh standard I worked as Superintendent in the Raja Holkar Boarding in Indore. The job gave me the means to live my life independently, and so I could later on become completely involved in Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement.

When I lived in the Lokhandi Chawl, the Dagadi Chawl was next to it and all the residents were our people. We used to hold meetings where everybody gathered. We would sing various songs in these meetings, to rouse people against untouchability.

Our situation is wretched,
Our place is on the rubbish-heap,
Cats and dogs make free in their houses,
Just as they like.

I did not go to Nagpur for the conversion of 1956, but later on we underwent conversion in Bombay. In those days activists would travel from village to village to initiate people into the Buddhist faith. I accompanied Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar to the villages around Nagpur and Aurangabad to hold programmes of initiation into the dhamma.

Even before Babasaheb announced his decision to convert to Buddhism in Yeola,[2] we had given up worshipping Hindu gods and fasting according to Hindu rituals. My father was a strict atheist. And so the issue of immersing the idols after conversion did not arise in our house.

Endnotes

1 Dr. Ambedkar set up the Independent Labour Party in August 1936, after the British Government decided to hold elections at the provincial level, as an alternative to the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League. In the elections held in February 1937, Ambedkar and several of his candidates were elected. He later set up the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942 and the Republican Party in 1956. These changes in name reflected shifts in Ambedkar's ideology as he sought to ensure protection of the interests of the Dalits.

2 Yeola or Yeole is the town in Nashik district where Ambedkar first declared his intention to convert from the Hindu faith: "I was born a Hindu, but I will not die a Hindu".

16

Shantabai Dani
(Age: 65)

My father's name was Dhanaji Bagaji Daani. He worked as a mason and carpenter. We were two sisters and two brothers.

My mother's name was Kundabai Jadhav. She had been married before, and had four children from her first marriage. But after her first husband died she was married to my father.

Saying that she really wanted to write about all these things in her autobiography, Shantabai Daani became silent. There was nothing much that we could say to this. Still, we wanted to get to know about the extent of Shantabai's participation in the movement, by whatever means we could. Shantabai did not take part in the satyagrahas of Mahaad and Nashik. When we asked her why this was so, she said that she was still too young at the time of the Mahaad satyagraha.

At the time of the Nasik satyagraha I had passed my final school examinations and was a student at the teachers' training college in Pune. However, I did take part to a large extent in the landless labourers' movement. And of course I was there in the movement for conversion to Buddhism. I was with Dadasaheb Gaikwad, Baburao Unvane and others in the campaign to spread the Dhamma, holding meetings in several places.

The first conversion meeting after 1956 was being held in Naitade village in Niphad tehsil. I was chairing a big meeting at Niphad station (Kundewadi). People had come from Naitade village carrying their gods in little baskets on their heads. An eighty-year-old man came forward and asked, "we have brought our gods here, what are we to do with them?" We told them that the gods were to be immersed in the waters of the nearby river Kajva. And so they immersed their Hindu gods and were initiated into Buddhism. These ceremonies were carried out in every village. The satyagraha of the landless took place after this.

I, together with Nana Patil and many other activists collected information about persons who had no land, in a team headed by P.J. Roham, then we fixed a date for the satyagraha. The satyagraha was held on an all-India basis in 1964. On that occasion 340,000 persons went to jail. The prisons were inadequate, so satyagrahis were lodged in schools, and sometimes just rounded up and kept in a field in thousands. But no satyagrahi ran away.

I am at present secretary of the Ramabai Ambedkar hostel in Nasik, which was started by Dadasaheb Gaikwad. We got two acres near the Rolf Round Circuit House for this purpose, and set up a school. Now it has classes from the 5th to the 10th standard. The Kunaal English-Marathi primary school has been established for classes 1 to 4. I am also secretary of the Dr.Ambedkar students' hostel at Manmad.

Babasaheb launched a satyagraha in 1946 to protest that appropriate representatives from the dalit community were not being selected for the Pune assembly. It was decided to go to the Pune assembly and brandish black flags. A tight cordon of armed policemen had been set up around the assembly house.

I was then an educated and well-dressed, capable-looking woman. Since it was impossible to enter the house from the front, I went in at the back door. A few selected women were with me. Nobody stopped us since we were taken to be persons with a right to enter. As soon as we entered the assembly hall we all raised slogans of "Victory to Dr. Ambedkar" and I waved a black flag. I and all the women with me were immediately arrested and sent to Yerawada jail. The Ambedkar movement had really gained an edge at this time. I was at the time president of the Nasik Scheduled Castes Federation, and so I was granted first-class status in prison, so we did not have a bad time.

Shantabai Daani was the only woman activist who became trained as a worker of the movement through her association with Dadasaheb Gaikwad. Although she could not give us much information as she was planning to write her autobiography, an idea of her work is available from accounts in newspapers and journals like Janata *and* Prabuddha Bhaarat.

Shantabai was chairperson of the Women's Council when the General Assembly of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation was held in Kanpur in 1944.

During the 1946 general election Shantabai stood for election from Niphad. The next year saw the partition of India and there were terrible massacres in Sind, Bengal and Punjab. Even in these circumstances Dadasaheb Gaikwad, P.N.Rajbhoj and Shantabai Daani toured the country to elicit support for the Scheduled Castes Federation. Shantabai was secretary of the Federation in Bombay province. In 1947, Satyagraha Day was celebrated in Nasik on a grand scale, with a procession of 10,000 men and women. After the procession a meeting was held in Nasik Municipality hall with Bapusaheb Rajbhoj in the chair. Dadasaheb Gaikwad, A.G. Pawar, Miss Shantabai Daani, N. Nandurkar, Shivrambhai More, Razzak Sheth, D.L.B. Memar, and Dr. Miss Londhebai were the speakers.[1]

In her speech Shantabai said, "The Congress party never even dreamt of securing the interests of labourers and peasants. So Dadasaheb Gaikwad established the Independent Labour Party to look after the interests of peasants and labourers. The independence we have gained is for Brahmins and traders only (shetya-bhatya). *Until the farmers and workers get power in their hands we will not be really independent. Babasaheb is aiming for this end and he will not rest until a peasants' and workers' state has been established."*[2]

In October 1947 Shantabai was part of a team touring the Vidarbha region :Yawatmal, Chanda, Balaghat, Nagpur and Amaravati, to strengthen the organisation. Rajbhoj and Shantabai were arrested on suspicion of being spies for the Razakars and detained in Jabalpur jail.

In 1947 Shantabai worked for the welfare of refugees, as well as in organising villagers in and around Nasik on water, land and other issues. She, together with Rambhau and Shivrambhau, was also present at the conference held in Junagadh in February 1950.

In the period 1968 to 1974 Shantabai was a member of the Legislative Council of Maharashtra. She was nominated to many committees of the Maharashtra government. She sharply attacked the state government's inadequate response to cases of injustice and violence against dalits.

Shantabai travelled to several countries of east Asia, where she was impressed by the widespread devotion to the Buddhist faith. In Malaysia and Sri Lanka she was able to observe the daily life of Buddhists.

The Janata *newspaper*[3] *records that Shantabai spoke at the Ambedkar birthday celebrations in several places. She also toured extensively in the month of May. It*[4] *also records that Shantabai stood for elections in the Bombay province against one Ranakhabai. The paper also published an introductory passage on Shantabai and an appeal to vote for her.*

Under the headline 'A Rani of Jhansi on the battleground of Elections' the reporter says, "This woman has earned a name in the field of social

organisation, surpassing many who are much younger than her. She was a primary school teacher. The orthodox lot didn't like the idea that an untouchable woman was a schoolteacher and they harassed her. But Shantabai was not one to give up easily."

Shantabai fought this election with courage. She was secretary of the Bombay Scheduled Castes Federation at the time. She had also issued a pamphlet to increase awareness about the importance of voting.

On 15th April 1958 Shantabai presided over the Ambedkar birthday celebrations organised by the Indian Buddhist Women's Association, Greater Bombay. In 1959 Shantabai led a 13-member action committee entrusted with organising the satyagrahas of the landless. The committee started satyagrahas of the landless at Umrane, Didori, Devargaon, Surgane, Peth, Igatpuri, Tryambak and other centres.[5]

When we asked Shantabai about her experiences in the movement, she answered,

While working in the movement, I was often the only woman touring with men activists. There were sometimes problems with going to the bathroom or performing morning ablutions. The men would be unaware that there was any problem. But I died a hundred deaths. However, except for this practical problem I never had any trouble. Everybody's behaviour was good.

Today I am living alone but I have not lost courage. The remainder of my life is totally engaged with my organisations and the work I have to do.

We untouchables took every word of Babasaheb's speeches as an inspiration. His words gave us identity, self-respect, independence and the strength to fight against injustice. We can say that his words shaped our minds and our personalities.

I was living the life of an ordinary schoolteacher, an ordinary woman, but Baba's work made me a social activist. The change I underwent surprises me even now.

Endnotes

1. *Janata*, 31st August 1947.
2. *Arun*, 1st September 1947.
3. *Janata*, 5th May 1951.
4. *Janata*, 22nd December1951.
5. *Prabuddha Bhaarat*, 5th September 1959.

17

Sakhubai Mohite
(Deceased)

We must really admire persons like Sakhubai Mohite who give over their homes to the social movement. She was one of the few women activists from the Konkan coastal region of Maharashtra. Sakhubai came from Chiplun tehsil in the Konkan. Her husband, Jaanuji Mohite, was a mill worker.

In 1938 Bhai (S.A.) Dange of the Communist Party and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar jointly organised a strike of textile mill workers in Bombay, and the workers came out on the streets with their demands. Street corner meetings and assemblies were being held everywhere. A riot broke out in Parel and deLisle Road in the mill district, and the Ambedkarite activists Bhagoji Waghmare and Bahiru Chavan were killed. It was around this time that Sakhubai Mohite, a woman living on deLisle road, entered the Ambedkar movement. She began to take part in meetings.

Sakhubai was a strongly built woman with a full voice and a fearless bearing, and she poured her soul into any task that she took up. So it is not surprising that Sakhubai won people's hearts after her first one or two speeches. She followed in the footsteps of Parvatibai Bhor, who took up mill workers' issues and was in the forefront of the struggle.

Up to the conversion of 1956 Sakhubai was taking part in programmes organised by men and making speeches. When Babasaheb died suddenly soon after the conversion, the dalit community was stricken. The community began to wander aimlessly like a craft without a sail. Sakhubai was one of the activists who made an effort to hold together the directionless masses.

Sakhubai did valuable work in bringing about conversion

functions in villages, raising a voice against injustice and violence against dalits, making facilities available to dalits, and setting up women's associations to spread awareness among the people.

Although Sakhubai was completely uneducated, she had a gift for argument and could hold large audiences spellbound with her speeches. Even before 1956 she spoke at several important meetings in Bombay. She was also a selfless organiser. In recognition of her qualities, she was named president of the All India Buddhist Women's Association. Also, when the All-India Republican Women's conference took place at the Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur on 13th May 1959, Sakhubai was elected president. The emphasis in this conference was that women must be organised if they are to achieve educational and cultural progress.

When the Republican Party split, Sakhubai joined the faction formed by B.C. Kamble and Avale, who had broken off to form their own organisation. This group was opposed to Dadasaheb Gaikwad, R.D. Bhandare and Barrister Khobragade. Sakhubai continued her work in the forefront of organising women, but she was with the splinter group. She set up a number of Mahila Mandals in various parts of Bombay. Her work consisted of supporting the Republican Party's weekly organ, holding women's conferences, and looking for experienced and active new cadres for the party.

A woman called Laxmibai Raju Jadhav, from a village called Jambhrun in Ratnagiri tehsil in coastal Maharashtra, used to work as an activist with Sakhubai Mohite. Laxmibai was some five years older than Sakhubai. Laxmibai established Mahila Mandals in Malad, Andheri, Borivali and other parts of Bombay. She organised a "tools down" satyagraha of quarry workers in Malad to demand an increase in wages. She collected funds from women for the Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial hall which had been built in Bhoiwada. Sakhubai made every woman who worked with her into a capable activist. These women later independently set up associations and asserted themselves in meetings and conferences. Among the women trained under Sakhubai's guidance to make a valuable contribution to the Ambedkar movement were Sumanbai

Bandisode, Malatibai Hindalekar, Seetabai Phale, Rukmini Shirke, Tanubai Bharude, Indumati Kamble and Prabhavati Bhalerao.

Sakhubai was a very popular leader among the dalit workers of Bombay. Her work was praised by them during many a procession. Songs were sung about her. Women would speak rhymes with her name in them: "There's rice on the stove/Is Sakhubai home?"

Sakhubai had no children. Her whole life was given over to the Ambedkar movement. She died around 1967. Some roads in the Shivdi and Delisle Road areas of Bombay are named after her. Some Mahila Mandals also bear her name to this day.

18

Keertibai Patil
(Age: 67)

My name in my parents' home was Annapurnabai Bhanudas Moon. I was born on 13th August 1922 in Nagpur. After marriage my name became Keertibai Taranath Patil. I worked as a schoolteacher at the Janata High School in Somalwada, Nagpur from 1956 to 1980.

I was married on 16th June 1939. At the time I was in the tenth standard in the Bhide Girls' High School in Nagpur. Matriculation in those days was in the eleventh standard. I finished my matriculation after marriage.

My mother-in-law did not treat me badly herself, but she would tell tales about me to my husband and he would beat me without bothering to inquire if her complaints were true. Before my marriage I had been a student and treated with fondness. So I did not stay to put up with this ill treatment. I returned to my parental home.

My husband's home was in Bela village in Umred tehsil. My

father-in-law Sitaram Patil was a *malguzar*, while his brother, Dasharath Patil, had long been an associate of Babasaheb and an activist in his movement. Both the brothers were elected members of the Legislative Council in 1936. They took part in every agitation in the Berar (Vidarbha) region, and also gave financial assistance and other forms of help.

In my parents' home we were quite well off. We were three sisters and one brother. My mother was a simple woman. It was my ambition to study and later on take up a job, and my father always encouraged me. In those days girls were married very early. But since I was the youngest daughter, my father paid no attention to the remarks and criticism of those around him, and allowed me to study up to the tenth standard. He did not press me to get married till I was seventeen. My sisters did not do well in school, and they were married when they were much younger than I was. My brother Mahadevrao Moon, however, completed his B.A. and got a job at Nagpur airport when he was in his first year of law studies.

When I left my husband's home eight years after I was married, I had three children. But since I was committed to my views and because my mother looked after my children, I appeared for two drawing examinations and also passed two grades of government examinations in Hindi.

It must have been around 1932 or 1933, when I was nine or ten years old, that I had the chance to meet Babasaheb for the first time, because I was with my father. Later, when my father Bhanudas Moon, my mother, my brother and I went on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur, we visited Babasaheb on our way back and we had lunch at his home.

On that occasion the meal had been prepared by Babasaheb's first wife Ramabai and her sister-in-law. Ramabai was thin, rather tall and fair-complexioned. I can see her in my mind's eye even now. Ramabai appeared weak and even ill. But she was quick and alert in serving her guests. That was the only time I saw her.

In 1942 there were plans to hold the 'All India Untouchables' Conference in Nagpur. A women's meeting was also to take place.

At the time I had just passed my matriculation. I was the first matriculate among untouchable girls and, besides, I was from a home of activists. It was two years since my marriage and I had a nine-month-old son. My father had brought me home for a short stay. Then I decided to take part in the 1942 conference.

Meetings of activists had begun to be held, to work out the agenda and arrangements for the conference. I used to attend these meetings along with my father. Some other girls still at school like me and some educated women also attended these meetings: Mrs. Indira Patil, Miss Manjula Kanphade (later Sudha Ramteke), Miss Kausalya Nandeshwar (Mrs. Baisantri) and others.

I was elected president of the welcome committee for the Women's Conference and Mrs. Indira Patil was secretary. Mrs. Patil was then a teacher in the Municipal Corporation School. Mrs. Sulochanabai Dongre (wife of Captain Dongre) had been chosen to preside over the Women's Conference. She too was a matriculate and involved in social activity.

Baba was to be present for all three days of the conference. We too stayed there for three days; all our meals were catered for. My mother was looking after my baby and so I was free to take part in the conference. We had the opportunity to be with Baba for three whole days. After the day's meetings about a hundred of us would gather round Baba. Among the delegates from outside Nagpur were Dadasaheb Gaikwad, Jadhav, Bhole, N. Shivraj, Bhandare, Rajbhoj, Madkebuva and other committed workers of the movement. Baba in a simple *dhoti-sadra* seemed very close to us.

After the main conference on the first two days, the women's conference was to be held on the third and last day. The meeting began at four in the afternoon. Thousands of women had gathered there. Before the meeting, Mrs. Indira Patil , Mrs. Sulochanabai Dongre and I had discussed the main points to be covered in our speeches with the senior leaders. We wrote down our speeches accordingly and read them out to the assembly. Before this I had no experience of preparing a properly organised speech and reading it before the microphone.

Even though we had prepared the speeches, when I stood there on the stage in Babasaheb's presence, in a gathering of activists, with an audience of thousands of women, my legs almost gave way. But soon I recovered myself and delivered my speech in a resonant voice. After the three of us had spoken, Baba gave a long speech intended for the women. After all these years, I cannot remember what we said in our speeches. But I can remember a little of Baba's speech. It has also been published elsewhere. I always made it a point to attend whenever Baba was speaking in Nagpur. I also attended the conference of the Dalit Parishad in Bombay in 1945.

On 14th October 1956 we, all of us, hundreds of thousands of us, underwent conversion to Buddhism at the Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur. After the ceremony Baba was still seated on the dais. A girl named Kumud Kamble from my hostel had asked me to get Baba's autograph, so I found my way through the crowd and went up to ask him for his autograph. Maisaheb angrily objected: "Not now...not now". But Baba noticed me and he at once gave me his autograph, not listening to Maisaheb.

Because of physical illness I could not take part in the satyagraha of the landless in 1965. But I took part in the 1979 march led by Jogendra Kavaade for the renaming of Marathwada University in 1979. Thousands of men and women had come from all parts of Nagpur for the march. When the marchers reached the radio station near the Collector's office, the police charged with lathis and used teargas. Since it was a long march, we had turned back when we heard that things might take a bad turn, as I had a cataract in my eye and could not see well.

Many persons were jailed on that occasion. We women made rounds of the *bastis* to collect whatever we could: money, wheat, rice, pulses, and we saw to it that *chapattis* and *bhaji* was sent to them every day. This went on for 15 days.

I treated my sons and daughters equally. I had inherited a share in my father's estate, and I divided it equally among them. You can understand this as you choose. Also, my daughter Iccha and my sons Vikas and Nishchay all love me equally.

The next generation must take part in Baba's social reform movement, it is the need of our age. I am satisfied that my children are aware and socially committed.

My elder daughter-in-law is a B.A., B.Ed. and she is vice-president of the "Sevo" Mahila Mandal in South-eastern Railways. This association does useful work like distributing bread, biscuits and fruit to poor patients, and clothes, etc. to poor children and mothers with new-born babies on 15th August and 26th January, Independence Day and Republic Day. Around Ambedkar's birthday every year, we hold a series of lectures, bring out a special publication in which we give information about Babasaheb's work among the people.

If you ask me about educated women today, I don't like it that they think a lot of themselves once they are educated. I believe that one who does not become tolerant after getting an education is ignorant in spite of being educated. They should feel respect for their uneducated elders. Women should work for the society, take up a job (only if necessary), serve the people, they should have the objective of doing something for the community that has brought them up. While living for themselves they must give a thought to the community.

I have translated the English book *The Gospel of the Buddha*, by Paul Carras, into Marathi and it has been published as *Tathagathachi Satygatha*. I have also written two more books, *Bouddhanchi Jeevancharya* (The Way of Life of Buddhists) and *Boudddhajidnyaasa*. They have been published.

19

Indirabai Patil
(Deceased) (Age: 45)

Indira Patil used to live at Chhoti Dhantoli, Nagpur. Their house was a hub of social activity with a constant coming and going of people working in the movement.

Indirabai was born on 28th August 1919. Her father, Seetaram Bajirao Haadke, was a close associate of Babasaheb and a devoted follower. Indira was married on 25th August 1931 when she was in the third standard at school, to Mr. R. R. Patil. At the time of the marriage Patil was 26 years old and Indira was 13.

Following the tradition both of her paternal home and her husband, Indira joined the activities of the Ambedkar movement. Mr. Patil allowed her to continue her studies after marriage. It was expected that this would help her in doing social work and also enable her to take up a job and contribute to the family expenses. When her first son, Manohar, was nine months old, Indira passed her seventh standard examination.

In 1931, R.R. Patil was in charge of a scout squadron. He would attend every meeting of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Because of his meticulous approach to work, Baba named him general secretary of the All India Samata Sainik Dal, and so the house became even more a centre of the movement. In those days Jaibai Chaudhuri and Radhabai Kamble were working in the dalit social movement and Indirabai too was encouraged by her husband to join them.

The 1932-33 Round Table Conference was an important event for the Ambedkar movement. The question was raised whether Mahatma Gandhi or Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar should be considered the true leader of the untouchables. Telegrams were

sent by untouchables all over the country, from Nagpur, Pune, Bombay, Delhi and Nasik, saying, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is the true leader of us untouchables." Only three telegrams named Mahatma Gandhi as leader. R.R. Patil and Indirabai also sent telegrams supporting Babasaheb.

In 1935 Babasaheb made the Yeola declaration of his intention to convert. In 1936 he called a conference of all his activists in Nagpur in connection with the planned conversion to Buddhism. After this people got rid of their pooja beads and their Hindu gods. They also shaved off their moustaches and beards.

Indirabai Patil was general secretary of the All India Untouchable Women's Council when it held its annual conference on 20th July 1942. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was present, and he was delighted to see that 20 to 25 thousand women were attending. His speech addressed to the women on this occasion was particularly inspiring.

In 1946 there were riots in Nagpur in which Hindus clashed with untouchables. Indirabai's father Seetaram was a well-known pehelwan, people called him the Steel Man. He would advise the untouchables in public meetings, "If the Hindus throw stones at you, you also throw stones. Resist them, answer their blow with a blow. Don't stand for injustice, only then will you succeed."

The Hindus would launch attacks from Bhaankheda and Koshtipura. Once when Indirabai was sitting at home cleaning rice, the Hindu goondas threw a spear at her, intending to injure her as she was Seetaram Haadke's daughter and he was known to be the chief of the untouchables. The spear did not hit her and the attackers ran away.

When Hariharrao Sonule stood for election in the Nanded region in1962, Indirabai was one of the chief campaigners. Slightly stout, with a round, smiling face, Indirabai used to wear a nine-yard sari with its corner draped over her head. She was a teacher in the Nagpur Municipal Corporation school. Her three sons and two daughters are all educated and in good jobs. Indirabai and her husband both embraced Buddhism, and Indirabai worked to convince people to convert. She died on 28th February 1964.

20

Ramabai Gaikwad

My father used to do duty as a *veskar* (traditional work of guarding the boundary of the village, given to Mahaars)— he had some haadki hadavali land and he tilled it. We were three sisters and one brother. Only my brother and youngest sister went to school. We were three sisters, all happy in the same house after marriage. So Seetabai was given to Dadasaheb Gaikwad in marriage. After her, Dadasaheb Gaikwad's brother Kashinath Gaikwad asked for my hand, and then, when Seetabai didn't have any children my sister Geetabai was married to Dadasaheb.

Dadasaheb Gaikwad was the one that Babasaheb believed in, his right hand man, and my husband was a contractor. When Babasaheb came to our house, oh, how they used to talk. Seetabai also used to take part.

We were seven daughters-in-law. Together we looked after all the people at home, and all the guests. We would get up at three in the morning before the cock crowed. We would grind five, six *pailis* of grain at a time, till we had blisters on our hands. Sitting at the grindstone we used to sing *ovis*.

At the time of the Kalaram temple entry our house was buzzing with guests. There was a great bustle of activists. Cooking food for all these people made our backs ache. But everywhere there was just one refrain: we are going into the temple. I was happy at the thought that I was going to have a *darshan* of Rama.

Seetabai said to me, "You sing very well. You must also come along." All of us went to the satyagraha. Seetabai told us to walk in a line and not crowd each other.

We were to start off from the *rajwada*. Sakharam the wrestler, Vardhekar Buva and Babu Shejwal had also come there. Dadasaheb, Babasaheb, Rajbhoj, Rankhambe, Bhalerao and who knows what

activists were there. The rajwada is now called the Boudhha Wada, we started from there and headed straight for the Rama temple in Panchavati.

Together with the bhajan singers we women also went along singing songs. We were speaking the name of god. The procession was so huge that the people at the back couldn't see the ones in front. We didn't know what was going on at the front of the procession. Our procession was stopped. They wouldn't let us go into the temple. They were saying that the temple was private, the Adhekars had built it and it was the Adhekars' property. The Collector, D.S.P., they all came. There was a great hullabaloo and arguing. Then we all went on to the Rama pond. On both sides of the pond there was open space and the Brahmins, the Vaanis, all started to throw stones. We all began to run from there.

This time it was decided to hold a *dharna* around the temple.

On the day of *amavasya*, when there is no moon, the Rama chariot was to start from there. So we people went along with Babasaheb to stop the chariot. Babasaheb, Dadasaheb, Rankhambe, Rajbhoj, Appasaheb and who knows how many others were there. There was a big commotion, lots of blows, and they didn't even let us touch the chariot. What we women had to listen to from the men!

The police arrested those who were trying to enter the temple. Rambhabai Jadhav, Sonubai Shinde, Ganpat Shinde and many others were arrested. The men were put in jail for three months and the women for two months.

We were all illiterate women working in the house but from that day on we felt we must do something. We used to sing—

The Collector was in a fix,
What to do with this satyagraha
We've locked up the doors
And the bhaturas can't get darshan

At the time Dadasaheb Gaikwad and Babasaheb were really close to each other. We used to sing about them—

The quorum's full. It's passed the motion:
Dadasaheb is Babasaheb's right hand.

The mother has given birth to pure gold,
Everyone knows Baba and Dadasaheb are good,
Come, brothers and sisters, take to the roads,
The buses come filled with their supporters.

At the time Babasaheb used to say in his speeches, "Why should we live like insects and vermin, why should we rot in this dirt? We must raise ourselves up. We must send our children to school, they must cast their light on the world..." I liked these words of Baba very much. I would feel I must teach my babes... My husband used to join in Baba's work after taking care of his affairs. I also had my babes, how would I get a chance to go out of the house! Seetabai used to work along with Dadasaheb.

Seetabai started a Mahila Mandal. I was also in it. Women like Yasabai, Rankhambebai, Ramabai Jadhav were in it. We used to say in the Mahila Mandal that we must all support Babasaheb. We must follow in his footsteps.

The *Vaanis* (traders) in town gave us a lot of trouble because we held a satyagraha. We could not get salt or chillies in the shop, we had to go a long way to the weekly bazaar to get them. They wouldn't even let us draw water properly. Before we reached the trough to draw water, the trough would be filled up with cow dung and mud. On the upper stretch of the river there was a Chambharwada where the leather would be washed at the time of drawing water. They would soil the river. Then we had no other choice, there was a well belonging to a Maratha in the town, we bought it. That Maratha had to face a lot of trouble from people of his caste.

My younger sister Geetabai also had no children. She too got involved in social work. During the satyagraha at the time of the Poona Pact my two sisters, Seeta and Geeta, had gone to Pune. My husband was also away. My husband Appasaheb and his brother Dadasaheb, the two brothers, looked very much alike. So people beat up Appasaheb thinking he was Dadasaheb. One of his ears was torn. Everyone said to him, come back now from the satyagraha, but he didn't listen to anyone, he went to jail in that condition.

When Dadasaheb held a satyagraha of the landless, we also went along, because that satyagraha was to demand land for the poor. At that time many women went to jail.

My sisters and I were simple women, but we got a lot of experience in Baba's movement. In those days, nobody told us not to go for the satyagraha. Nobody laughed at us, rather they made much of us.

When we took on a march to demand that a statue of Babasaheb be put up in Delhi, I too went for the march.

I bore five daughters and five sons. So my household was a large one, I could not do work like Seeta and Geetabai. Geetabai became matron in a girls' boarding school. She also became member of a municipality. She worked in the courts. But I looked after household affairs.

21

Kausalyabai Baisantri
(Age: 63)

We had often heard the name of Kausalyabai Baisantri (Nandeshwar). She was Joint Secretary of the students' association in the All India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942. She had made speeches in many meetings and some of them had been published in the Janata. *So we were eager to meet Kausalyabai.*

We knew that Kausalyabai lived in Delhi, but we did not have the exact address. We had to cross many doorsteps before we got hold of that address. In the end it was Dr. S.M. Nimgade of Delhi who got the address from some relatives, and sent it to us, and then the two of us immediately left for Delhi.

The young girl of 1942 was now a mature woman, rather an

aged scholar. A round smiling face, her state of health seemed to be good. She had on glasses, and a sari worn in the modern style. On the whole she looked like a professor, and her style of speaking, to-the-point and balanced, was also like that.

Her face showed great appreciation and respect that we had come such a long way to see her. We had already communicated our objective in meeting her and so she started off by talking about herself.

That I have reached the situation I am in today, and that I am well educated, is all due to my mother, Bhagirathibai Nandeshwar.

My mother was a mill worker, progressive in her ideas. She believed that girls should get an education and stand on their own feet. In those days, people would be critical if girls went to school and college where they had to be on equal terms with men. People would say to my mother, " Why do you educate your girls, you'll have trouble getting them married. Who from the caste will accept them?" My mother would answer them, " If nobody from the caste accepts them, there are lots of families outside the caste. My girls are sensible and well-behaved, they will find husbands for themselves."

And that is, in fact, what happened. All five of us sisters studied in school and college, we used to go around on bicycles. We had friends among boys as well as girls. So the people of our community called us names. Later we all married outside our caste.

Before my marriage I had studied up to the Intermediate year in college. I completed my B.A. after that. I was married in 1947. My husband's name was B.K. Baisantri. At that time he was 21 years old and doing his D.Litt. His native village is in Bihar and his caste is *dhobi* (washer man). At present he is Deputy Director of the Principal Central Information Broadcasting. Since ours was an inter-caste marriage, it was a registered marriage.

In those days inter-caste marriages were not common. Since ours was like that, people said to my mother, "You must have got a lot of money so you sold your daughter." My youngest sister was

married to a man from U.P. My mother herself went to register the marriage. My father also made no objection.

I was born in 1926. My father's name was Ramaji Nandeshwar. We lived in the Khalashiline area of Nagpur. My father worked as butler for an English sahib in Ramdas Peth. Later on he got a job in the mill. We were quite well off, five sisters and one brother. My eldest sister went to school up to the 5th standard. Then she was married at the age of thirteen.

My mother had a lot of respect for Babasaheb, and she felt she would like to work in his movement. This subject was often discussed at home, so as we grew up we learned quite a lot about the movement. That is why I also decided to work in the Ambedkar movement. From 14th October 1956 onwards, Dhammachakra Parivartan Day is celebrated on a large scale each year at the *deekshabhoomi* in Nagpur. On these occasions hundreds of thousands of people come from out of town, and as there was no facility to provide drinking water to the poor among them, my mother built a well on that land at her own cost. Today so many people have benefited from this facility, and this gave my mother great satisfaction.

After having learnt these lessons from my mother at an early age, I became General Secretary of the All India Scheduled Castes Students' Federation in 1942. I spoke on the resolutions that were proposed at that time. I was very young then but educated girls were encouraged to come forward and I was quite bold. I was at the time studying in the ninth standard. During 1947 I worked for the dalit students' council in Central Provinces and Berar. It was at these conferences that I came to know B.K. Baisantri and later the acquaintance led to marriage.

I was ten years old when Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar came to Kasturchand park in Nagpur. That was the first time I heard a speech by Babasaheb.

When I was a young girl my mother bought me a bicycle and the boys would knock it down. They would send me love letters. Before the conversion, if we brought a Ganapati to our home (during the Ganesha festival) people threw stones at our house.

They would break tiles on the roof, throw dirt around.

At Ramtek and other pilgrimage spots near Nagpur there would be clearly written signs saying that entry was prohibited for untouchables. When I was about eleven years old I had gone to Ramtek. My mother said, "You don't look like a Mahaar. You take a *lota* and bring water from the well." Somebody asked me, "What is your caste?" I said, "Maratha", then he asked me whether I was of the Suryavanshi or Chandravanshi sub-caste (clan of the sun or the moon) and I replied, "Suryavanshi" and ran from there as fast as I could. They used to beat any untouchable found there once they knew their caste, but I got away because I lied.

In our colony there was only one tap. There would be many quarrels there. I tried very hard to get a tap connection inside our house. Among the boys and girls I was the first girl to be so bold. At that time Lala Jayanarayan, mayor of the municipality, lived in the Khalashi Lines. He was a peculiar character. When I approached him for a tap connection, he would tease me. "Come to the cinema with me", he would say. In our colony in the Khalashi Lines if any girl came home after six o'clock people would ask, "Where has she been and what has she been doing?" There was another member (of the municipality). When I went to meet him about the tap connection, he also began to ask, "Coming to the cinema?" so he too turned out to be that sort of person. Then I screwed up my courage. In the waterworks department there was a Chief Engineer by the name of Rajadhyaksh. I told him what the actual situation was, that we had to spend a lot of time at the public tap, we lost time from our studies, and so on. He helped us and our tap problem was permanently solved.

In 1945 the central government scholarship scheme was introduced. At the time I was then studying in the Intermediate class. A notice was put up in Nagpur University saying that graduate students were to be sent to London for Montessori training. I explained my situation to Babasaheb and requested him to recommend my name. At that time Sir Maurice Gwyer was Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University. I sent him my application but he

turned me down saying that I didn't know English. And so I missed out on a chance to go abroad.

The conversion ceremony was to take place in Nagpur on 14th October 1956 and later on in Delhi too. So we did not go to Nagpur. Later there was a ceremony in Delhi, but this took place on 12th December after Babasaheb's death and it was also a condolence meeting. We were present for this conversion.

In 1946 there was a big satyagraha in Nagpur to press for separate constituencies for dalits. During the demonstration we registered our protest by holding up the car of Chief Minister Ravi Shankar Shukla. I was a college student at the time. The police were arresting the demonstrators and putting them down a long way off, as if we were little puppies.

My mother, my sisters and I had gone along with our packed lunches. Our slogans were, " Babasaheb zindabad, soon we will have Bheemraj" and "Gandhi is not our leader, we will fight the orthodox". When they heard Babasaheb's name, even illiterate women would run and join us.

My husband, B.K. Baisantri, also took part in social activism. But he neither encouraged me nor opposed me. I used to take my own decisions, manage the work of the household and the children and then go out. I was used to hard work from my childhood because my mother worked in the mill. I was present for many programmes of the Scheduled Castes Federation. Reports of these programmes were published in the *Janata* and other newspapers.

I have three sons and a daughter. My sons underwent higher education and are now holding high posts. My daughter studied up to her second year of undergraduate studies and then completed the degree course at the Film Institute in Pune. She too had an inter-caste marriage: her husband is a sardarji (a Sikh).

For some time, because of bringing up and educating my children, I could not take active part in the movement. But from the last fifteen years we have started an organisation called the Bhartiya Mahila Jagruti Parishad, Indian Council for Awareness of

Women. This organisation has members from Bengal, Madras, Andhra, and Maharashtra and women from several castes like Dhobi, Chambhar, Mahaar, Bhangi, and Buddhists. The working committee of the council has: Mrs. Velayuddha Dakshapani as President, Mrs. Rama Bhagwandas, Phulwanti Hazara, Shyama Ranjan as Vice-Presidents, Kausalya Baisantri Secretary, and Rajani Awachal as Joint Secretary.

Our objective in starting this organisation was to promote awareness among dalit and Buddhist women, to acquaint them properly with Baba's work, and to bring about social reforms, and it is worth noting that it is not only Buddhist women who are members.

I feel that my daughter and daughters-in-law should work in the movement. My daughter, Sujata Singh, works with me in the dalit movement. I have published several articles on social issues in various newspapers. My article on women's organisations was published in the *Jaibheem* newspaper which comes out from Madras, on 16th July 1947. I also used to translate articles from English. When Meenambal Shivraj made a speech in English at the Chokhamela Boarding in 1947, I translated her speech into Marathi so that it would be understood by all the people there.

From time to time we hold conferences to take forward the work of social awakening and the dalit movement. In 1984 we held a conference in Delhi on "Dalit Women: Problems and Prospects". On that occasion we discussed the rising violence against dalits and other problems faced by women. Sugandha Shende, Kumud Pawade, Nalini Somkuwar, Dr. Shantabai Gavai, Pushpa Sakharkar and others had come to Delhi from Nagpur for the conference. Vimal Sardesai, wife of the Communist Party leader B.T. Ranadive, presided. (Sardesai is her maiden name).

Last of all, I will say that I feel regret that our women do not get involved in the movement as deeply as they should, that is an experience I often have nowadays.

22

Nalinitai Ladke
(Age: 66)

My name before marriage was Punja Shivramji Kale. I was born on 1st September 1922. My parents somehow managed to send me to school up to the seventh standard. When I had passed my seventh standard, during the period 1938 to 1940, I worked as an untrained teacher. My paternal home was in the village of Sategaon in the Daryapur tehsil. Sampatrao from Belora fixed up my marriage, and in 1943 I was married to Anandrao Ladhke. It was a registered marriage and I was nineteen years old at the time.

Anandrao was from the Maali caste. He was a person who lived according to the philosophy of Mahatma Phule and he was an active worker in the dalit liberation movement organised by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He had been married before. Once he invited a Mahaar friend to sit down with him in his kitchen and have a meal, and he expected his wife to pick up his friend's plate as well afterwards. But his wife refused and he took a divorce from her, saying that "Everyone who comes to my house is equal. And if you don't like this then it is impossible for us to live together." He said this to her father. He then decided that if he could find a girl who would share his commitments within his caste, well and good, otherwise he would marry an untouchable girl. It was after this incident that I was married to him. In Sategaon I was the only educated woman. Further, since I belonged to the Kolhati caste among the dalits, people gave me a lot of trouble. But I had already learned to be firm, and I was more than a match for them. Anandarao was always behind me, so I began to take part in the work of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

In the Amaravati Municipality Hindi Primary school I was the

only trained teacher, further I had passed the national "Kovid" examination in Hindi. While I was thus educationally qualified, a person who was quite unsuitable from the educational point of view was appointed headmistress because she knew influential persons. I raised my voice against this.

Around this time a Hindu religious sacrifice, a *yadnya*, was held in Amravati. There was also a women's conference. Karpaatri Maharaj was scheduled to speak in this conference against the Hindu Code Bill. I had made a study of the Hindu Code Bill; so I went along to hear what he had to say against it. The points in his speech were nothing to do with the Hindu Code Bill. He just gave some imaginary descriptions and then declared that only religion and devotion to our husbands–*paativratya*–could protect us, that we had no need for laws; this was the sort of speech he made before the women.

I asked for permission to speak and explained the security that women would gain through the Hindu Code Bill and showed up the vacuity of Karpaatri Maharaj's speech. The lady chairperson Mrs. Tarabai Padhye signalled me several times to stop speaking. I told the audience over the mike that she wished me to stop. Cries of "Let her speech go on" came from the people. Finally I finished my speech and placed just one question before the women for their consideration: "If devotion to our husbands is the only thing that can protect us, then in view of the terrible things that happened to thousands of women at the time of the creation of Pakistan (partition), we would have to say that not a single pativrataa exists in India today. So it is as if Karpaatri Maharaj has called us all corrupt. Conscious women should think about this, and expose the tactics of this religious council which opposes the Hindu Code Bill." After this all the women got up and walked out.

Later, a meeting of both men and women was held under the chairmanship of the respected Mr. Khaparde and a resolution criticising me and opposing the Hindu Code Bill was passed.

In actuality the plan was to collect women together under the pretext of a "Ramrajya Religious Council" and get their signatures on a resolution that the Hindu Code Bill should be repealed, to

send to the government. But since I had harshly criticised the speaker and shown the women how the Hindu Code Bill would benefit them, they left without signing the resolution.

On that occasion the so-called learned gentlemen condemned me. They could not find fault with the Hindu Code Bill, since Baba had set out the indisputable truth in that bill. In the end those people came down on my caste and started saying, "Since this woman is of a low caste she has a perverted character." With this argument they cast aspersions on me to their hearts' content and then dissolved the meeting. I will always remember this occasion.

Because I was a dalit woman I was subjected to injustice time and again. One such instance was that while I was working as an untrained teacher during the years 1938 to 1940. I was paid eight rupees instead of ten and when I asked for a receipt for the lower sum to sign, in revenge they cooked up an incident implicating me.

In another case when a girl suffered a nosebleed, the school authorities took her blood-soaked clothes, prepared a false report saying that "this blood is the result of this teacher beating a student", and sent it to the council. Because the person sending the report was a person of some import, an inquiry committee was set up. The inquiry took place.

Since the girl told the truth about what happened I got justice. If the girl had given a false testimony, not only would I have lost my job, but all paths of future progress would have been closed to me.

I have always done my work with dedication. I always give women guidance on women's social uplift, child care and women's education. On 29th February 1949 a Dalit women's conference was held at Dhamangaon in Amravati. I was the chairperson. Laxmibai Naik, Arunadevi Pise and Hirabai Meshram made speeches at this meeting. We passed a resolution backing the Hindu Code Bill in this meeting. We also passed a resolution that hostels be set up for untouchable women and that they be provided free education. A report of this meeting has been published in the

Janata of 26th March 1949. In 1977, on 5th September, Teachers' Day, I was presented with the national award for "Ideal Middle School Teacher". I also got the Savitribai Phule award for 1986-87.

At present I am working as member, president, or secretary on several bodies. Even today, when Ambedkar's birthday or death anniversary, or Mahatma Phule's or Savitribai Phule's anniversary is celebrated in Amravati, I am called to speak on the occassion by some institution or sometimes by our own Mandal. So on these occasions I try to bring about people's enlightenment by telling them about Babasaheb's work and Mahatma Phule's social activity. I am always inspired by Babasaheb's thoughts.

23

Vimal Rokade
(Age: 70)

The Satyashodhak Samaj, Parel, conducted elocution classes. We went to meet Vimal Rokade, who taught at these classes, in her room at Husaini House in Parel.

Looking at Vimaltai one would think she was a retired professor. And this feeling was reinforced when she began to speak. But Vimaltai knocked down our preconceptions with her first sentence, "I am not much educated. My mother died when I was four years old, and my father was in the military. So that was the end of my education".

My father took part in the liberation struggle at Mahaad. In our childhood we lived in the Cement Chawl near where Babasaheb lived. The atmosphere around us was such that at an early age we understood what the movement was about. The Mahaad and Nashik battles took place in our childhood and our people were on the

path to a religious resolution of the question. (Dr. Ambedkar later abandoned attempts at temple entry and considered instead that dalits should leave the Hindu faith). Just as it is hard to rub off the vermilion paste *(sindur)* daubed on a stone so it is hard to cast off the religious traditions imbued in the mind.

The man I was married to was the son of an old associate of Babasaheb. So I was encouraged to do social work in my in-laws' home too. In the beginning I used to listen to the speeches of Babasaheb and other activists. Later I went to classes run by the Satyashodhak Samaj[1] to learn how to speak myself. There were speeches on politics, religion, ethics, economics and other subjects. They also taught us to speak on the thoughts of Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar, Gandhi and others. A guruji named Laxmanrao Vichare taught us. I had also written an article in the *Prabuddha Bhaarat* of 22nd October 1957 entitled "Women Organise".

Whatever Babasaheb said on the subject of religious conversion, I, Sakhubai Mohite, Pavitrabai Thokale, Rukmini Sirsat, Bandisode, Bagul, Vithabai and others would carry to the women in the *bastis* around us. On 11th November 1956 we organised a Buddhist Dharma Prachar meeting in the compound of the Hind Mills. The meeting was chaired by Sakhutai Bagade and Rekhatai Sasolkar, Indutai Bansode and I made effective speeches calling on men and women to join the conversion movement in thousands and hundreds of thousands. A report of this meeting was published in the *Prabuddha Bhaarat* of 17th November 1956.

When Babasaheb undertook initiation in the Dhamma in Nagpur we women had also gone there in large numbers.

I went to Delhi as a representative of the Buddhist Mahasabha with Atre and other leaders of the movement for a united Maharashtra state. Babasaheb had advised the leaders of this movement, " Do not go and make this demand as the demand of only one party. Form an all-party committee and your demand will be granted." Accordingly, such a committee was formed.

In 1968 I stood for elections. My desire was to serve the people selflessly as a representative of the people but I was unsuccessful.

Earlier I was in the Bhandare group but later I joined the Congress Party. I became a Justice of the Peace. I worked in the movement for the rights of bonded labourers.

Under Mukundrao's leadership we carried the message of conversion to Pune, Yawatmal, Aurangabad and other places. Hundreds of people underwent conversion. In some places we were stoned as we were making speeches.

In Purna, near Nanded, a neo-Buddhist was sitting in the market trying to sell bananas. A group of Brahmins was walking by and they asked him to get up but because he didn't get up quickly enough they beat him up with hard leather shoes. The Buddhist came straight to our meeting in his bloodstained state. We took him to the police station, and the police gave the Brahmins a warning.

We activists had many bad experiences of casteism in the villages. We went to attend the Konkan conference in Sangameshwar Pedame. When we, that is, Ghanshyam Talwatkar, Motiram Mohite, N.M. Kamble and I went to Pedame, we felt thirsty. We asked a man who was working in the fields for water. He recognised Motiram Mohite and deduced that we were untouchable activists. So he pointed to the water that had been kept for mixing cow dung and gestured to us to drink that.

When we were doing this work everyone in the house and in the community encouraged us. My husband would urge me, " Don't waver when you are making a speech, express your thoughts clearly." Babasaheb used to tell us, "Keep yourselves clean, always be neat in your dress."Accordingly I was always neatly dressed. When I stood for elections in 1958 from the United Maharashtra party, S.A. Dange (founder of the Communist Party of India), Samyukta Maharsahtra leader P.K. Atre, and Communist Party leader Ahilyabai Rangnekar had come to a campaign meeting. My daughter had come with me. Dange said, "She must be her sister", but Atre was more perceptive, "No, she is her daughter".

When I had to go out and work, cooking seemed a great chore to me. I had taught my husband how to cook so that he could make meals when I had my monthly periods, and so that when I was ill

the stove should not also fall ill. My husband helped me to the extent of ironing my *saris*, bringing me garlands of flowers for my hair, even checking whether my *chappals* were in good repair. It was only because I got such co-operation that I was able to do social work.

I have only one daughter. The girls were less educated than my husbands' brothers' sons. After all it is a male-dominated society.

Endnotes

1 Followers of Mahatma Phule's teachings

24

Parbatabai Meshram
(Age: 65)

When we went to meet Parbatabai it was nine o'clock at night. We saw a woman of about sixty, with white, dishevelled hair, wearing a slightly soiled looking sari, she was an old woman really, quite tall and of medium build. She was sitting on the cot.

We sat down on the cot beside her and told her our reason for coming. The tape recorder switched on, and she started to talk.

I am very proud of Babasaheb. I learnt to roll *beedis* when I was a child. It was the age to go to school, but we were more worried about earning our livelihood, as those were hard days. We lived in terrible poverty. There were no pots in the house, we did not have good clothes to wear, nor enough to eat. So I used to watch my mother make beedis and learned to sit and do the same to help her. This became my daily routine. Get up in the morning, wash the one pot, help mother with the cooking and then sit down to roll beedis. My name was Subhadrabai Lonare. I had heard

about Babasaheb and the work he did for our society since when I was ten years old. Even before I was married I went around a lot for Babasaheb's work. After my marriage I used to go meetings, or for marches sometimes, with Radhabai Kamble and Seeta Pailwan (Seetabai Krishnarao Patil of Dharampeth). When I saw the tremendous scope of Babasaheb's work my heart was filled with thankfulness, and I decided in my mind that I would do my best to help in Babasaheb's movement. And luckily such a chance came along quite soon.

At that time Radhabai was working in the ginning mill (in Nagpur). She would stop the men and women as they came out of the gate when their shift was over and hold meetings by the side of the gate. My, what speeches she used to give, everybody would stand still and listen. Her language was fiery, and she would impress the people all right. Radhabai who had studied up to the fourth standard worked for Babasaheb's movement with more passion than many great leaders. I too felt like working with her. But I was at home and they in the mill, it wasn't possible.

Then Babasaheb stood for election. So campaign meetings started in each basti and mohalla, and in the villages. Then Seeta Pailwan and I began to go along with Radhabai Kamble for campaigning. Hardas Babu Avale was standing from Kamathi. We went to Bhandara, Gondiya, Indora and Kamathi to campaign. With us there were B.P. Mourya, R.D. Bhandare, Khobragade, Kamble, Avale and others.

In those days Seeta Pailwan used to live near Lendhra Park. When there was a meeting people would come and ask me, Radhabai; and Seetabai to come along. Then we would go together. My uncle, Chandrabhan Joshi Master, was a great wrestler (*pehelwan*). He was a leader too. Tulshiram pehelwan, his son Bhujang pehelwan, Chandrikapurebai, Kamblebai, we would all go together to the meeting.

Jaibai Choudhari lived in Sadar camp. Hardasbabu Avale lived in Lashkaribagh. Everyone worked hard to campaign for Babasaheb. We took out processions when there was injustice or attacks against us. People would come from all around, from Kamathi, Kanhan,

Indora, Teka, Imamwada, Jhaturli, Bhaankheda, and Shantinagar. When we uttered Babasaheb Ambedkar's name, people considered it as precious as life itself, and they would keep unity. They would join processions in large numbers because they knew that these leaders had dedicated their lives to the movement.

In 1946 we took out a procession to campaign for Babasaheb. The procession was five miles long. As we walked along the streets in the procession, we would shout different slogans like,

The blue flag of the dalits, it is dearer to us than life,
We must become the ruling community,
This is the slogan of the Scheduled Castes Federation.
Who is Ambedkar. He is the king of the oppressed,
Long Live Revolution, We'll soon have Bheemraj.

There was a march to oppose the Poona Pact. The slogans an this march were:

Gandhi's four-anna piece is broken,
Say victory to Babasaheb Ambedkar!
Rep Right, Rep Right, we came marching,
Ambedkar's army came and Gandhi ran away.

And so on.

In 1941 Babasaheb had come to Nagpur. He had just been appointed Labour Minister. We went to the railway station and gave him a grand welcome. The people's enthusiasm knew no bounds. There was a crowd of more than five thousand in which included Radhabai Kamble, Jaibai Choudhari, Seeta Pailwan and hundreds of women, and leaders like Barrister Khobragade, Advocate Meshram, Bhandare, Tirpude and others. Our procession went around the town with Babasaheb. We were shouting slogans for Baba on the streets. The whole city resounded with sky-shattering shouts:

Who is our leader?
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is !
Ambedkar has come, descended among us
We have lighted lamps in all the trees.....

So sang the women.

After some days the election was held but they wouldn't let

our people vote. At that time we were still Hindu, but Mahaar by caste, and so the Hindu people would pour out their anger on us, they thought we would pollute them. They didn't like it that we had reformed.

A huge riot took place. We heard the news that Advocate Sakharam Meshram had been surrounded by the police and held up. Then Rupchand, Gajbhiye, Husain and others from our colony rushed to free him. There was a big confrontation on Wednesday and three dalits died in police firing. Ramdas Dongre, Sampat Husain and Gajbhiye, these three became martyrs. We asked the police for their bodies but they didn't give them to us. Then we put a phone call through to Baba in Delhi and Baba spoke to the police on the phone, it was only after that that we got the bodies.

At that time the whole of Nagpur was in an upheaval. The funeral procession was huge. We took out a procession of respect and lit their pyres. The crossroads where these young men were martyred was from then on known as Golibar Chowk, Gunfire Square. The people made up verses about them.

Bullets were whizzing, Ramdas went ahead
Smiling he said, we have Bheem's blessing.
Brave Ramdas did not lose in battle,
A bullet hit his chest; he cried "Jai Bheem"

Once we went to Eklaari village near Bhandara. It was afternoon, and the basti was a long way off. We were terribly hungry. A woman of the kunbi caste gave us some fermented gruel to drink. So that we should not pollute her she gave it to us in a grain measure, and we couldn't drink it. Then I threw away the gruel and the measure. I was angry because she was giving us food while carefully keeping her distance.

Because of Babasaheb a feeling of self-respect was awakened in our minds. Baba would say, "The pride of being human is in all. Go to school, learn to wield a stick, a sword, learn lezim exercises. Just saying "Jai Bheem" won't do you any good, you must put it into action. Teach your daughters and sons. Throwing a few grains at dalits so that they will dance to their bidding is the morality of the Hindus. (At the time Babasaheb was standing for election.)

Don't cry if I am defeated in this election, it makes no difference to me. I have the law in my pocket."

We were uneducated, ignorant women. We hadn't seen the inside of a school. But when we heard Baba's speech, we had the urge to go to meetings, to try and do something. We started going to meetings, and in this way we came out of our houses. The confidence that we too could do something arose in our minds. And so we began to understand many things. We gained knowledge of the outside world. We began to understand the change that had come in us. We became aware of injustice, oppression and insult and a sense of identity was awakened in us. We began to prefer doing work for the society instead of sitting around and gossiping. And so we threw ourselves into social activity.

The uniform of the Samata Sainik Dal was a red shirt and khaki trousers for the boys, and a red blouse and white sari for the women. From then on I have always worn a white sari. Urkudaji Rahate lived in the Paanchpaavali area. He was an old activist, he preached the Buddhist faith. We used to visit the bastis with him, and this work of ours goes on even today.

On 14th October 1956 we accepted the Buddhist faith. We removed the old gods and goddesses from our homes. Now I have devoted my life to spreading the Buddhist religion. We go from village to village to do this. We went to Mangaon, Katol, Umred near Hinganghaat. I have unshakeable faith in Bhagwan Buddha and Babasaheb. I believe in the principles of *sheel, samadhi and pradnya.*

We must live by the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path. Buddhism shows us the path of progress. I went to Igatpuri three times for Vipashshyana camps. We have a Mahila Mandal. We go wherever we are invited on the birthday, on full moon day, for funerals and condolences. We observe Buddhist festivals. We fast on the full moon and make *kheer*. At every full moon there are prayers at the Buddha Vihaara, and speeches are made. We sing Baba's Buddhist religious songs. I have made up some songs myself. I make up songs and sing them.

Song 1

He gave up his life for the good of the people,
That's why, bai, I am mad about Buddha.
Some say Buddha is Vishnu reborn,
But I ask you, bai, was Vishnu like the Buddha?
Did Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, ever behave like this?
That's why, bai, I am mad about Buddha.

Song 2

Brothers and sisters, come to Buddha's place,
It's time to say prayers.
Fold your hands together, bow down your head,
It's time to say prayers.
Pay attention to every word,
So that your world will be liberated,
He has entrusted it to you.
It's time to say prayers.
Let your self-respect awake,
Don't ask for charity,
Bheemnanda told us this and left us,
Get ready to serve the people.
The sculptor of our lives said this and left,
Fold your hands together, bow down your head,
It's time to say prayers.

Earlier I used to take on contracts to do painting work. I have done the work of whitewashing railway buildings. Now my children don't let me work. Now my life is given to doing Buddha's work.

25

Muktabai Kamble
(Age: 87)

Many people of the Konkanastha caste have been living in the Khar area of Bombay since 1937. Earlier they used to live in Kamathipura, Seven Roads and other areas. Babasaheb had started working with these people from the last generation. And so we had heard that in this part of town activists were trained in every home, and later on, women activists also.

Devakabai Satambkar, Muktabai Kamble, Shantabai Wadwalkar and Susheela Jadhav earlier lived in that area and worked in the Ambedkar movement. What is more, Devakabai Satambkar's daughter is married to Mukundrao Ambedkar. So the winds of the movement had certainly touched the lives of the women here.

Devakabai is no longer living. We visited Khar to find out about her from her sister. Her sister Muktabai Kamble had been a teacher as well as an activist, so we met her. When we saw Muktabai we hardly felt that we were meeting an old woman aged 87 years. She was slim with lively movements and her memory was excellent. Muktabai began to speak:

We were three sisters and two brothers. My father Govind Shirke was a butler with an English sahib . He did not discriminate between his sons and daughters, he sent us girls to school as well.

Those days there was a school in Kamathipura up to the fourth standard, I started to go there. I studied up to the sixth class. After that I left school as my father could not afford the expense of books and uniforms. In 1919, when I was seventeen or eighteen years old, I was married to Dagduji Gangaram Kamble. My parent's home and my husband's parents' home was in Colaba district on

the Konkan coast, but we, husband and wife, and our families always lived in Bombay.

My husband was a mechanic. My father arranged my marriage with him even though he was uneducated. In those days educated girls were not thought much of. They would tease me, oh, she's a great schoolmistress! So even though I had passed the sixth standard I was as good as uneducated. But later on my education came in useful and I got a job as a teacher and I contributed to supporting the family. And with this, because of my education and the activists around me, I was inspired to join in the social activity that Babasaheb had set up, together with other women.

We would go around in Kamathipura, Parel, Bhoiwada and other districts of the city to spread Babasaheb's thoughts among the women. We would hold meetings. Since I was a schoolteacher I spoke fluently.

Babasaheb held a meeting at Kamgar Maidan, Parel in 1932. There were passionate speeches opposing the undesirable traditions of the Hindu religion and against worshipping Hindu icons. From then on many of our people in the Kamathipura and Parel areas gave up going on pilgrimages to Pandharpur and so on. The practice of holding community Ganesh festivals was also reduced in some parts.

Until about 1935 or 1936 I went to Babasaheb's meetings wherever I could. I took part in his birthday celebrations. There would be meetings of men and women. Then the English people living in Kamathipura would make inquiries with those among our people who worked for them as butlers, drivers etc., but our meetings were not concerned with the government. In the women's meetings we discussed subjects like child care, education of girls, collecting subscriptions and contributing to any programme of Babasaheb, starting new Mahila Mandals and collecting funds for setting up schools etc. Working with me were Mrs. Donde, Draupadibai Dikhale (Babasaheb's granddaughter), Rukmini Shirke (my sister-in-law), Salhubai Mohite, Devakabai Satambkar (Kamble), and others. Shanta Wadwalkar, Susheeela Jadhav, Shantabai Bhalerao were quite young then, but they used to be with us.

Devakabai Satambkar was my elder sister. My father married her to Damodar Kamble (Satambkar) when she was still in her cradle. He was a mechanic. After her marriage my father educated Devakabai. She stayed in our home till she completed her fifth standard. Then her husband took her to his home. He stopped her education, but she was very determined. Despite facing opposition she went to school up to the seventh standard. It was amusing that the school where we studied up to the fourth class, was extended up to the seventh standard even as we grew.

After she completed the seventh class Devakabai began to collect girls from the basti and to teach them in a room in the school. Pendhurkar, the Brahmin teacher in the school, encouraged her. For one year Devakabai taught the girls without taking any salary. So this class got recognised and Pendhurkar applied to the government asking that the classes be extended. Accordingly a separate class for girls was started in that school. Within a year the municipal corporation started a girls' school, and the credit for that goes to Devakabai.

Later Devakabai captivated audiences in many meetings. She held meetings to support Babasaheb's call for religious conversion. In a meeting held in Jehangir Hall we felicitated Ramabai. Ramabai was very shy.

Even though Devakabai was such a radical activist her husband was uneducated. Later on, we two younger sisters became trained teachers. In those times we had to suffer a lot from casteism. Not just our drinking water, but even the ink with which we signed the muster was kept separate.

Devakabai died early, but her daughter Shantabai Wadwalkar carried on her work. She too held meetings, gave speeches, came with us to various places. She is a trained teacher. Her husband is a bailiff in the court.

My second sister Parvatibai did not got to school. She was married to Sambhaji Tukaram Gaikwad. After my father died this brother-in-law brought us up like his own children. He too was a faithful activist in Babasaheb's movement.

I retired in 1956. I still go to Mahila Mandals and so on. We observe the festivals of the Buddhist faith. I feel that the women of the next generation should also spare time for social work and religious duties after looking after their households. Only then will we be able to help in the progress of our community.

26

Damayanti Deshbhratar
(Age: 53)

Damayantibai's name was well known to us as she was a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly. We went to her residence near the Buddha Vihara at Indora in Nagpur. Four or five people were talking to her at the time. After they had finished she smiled broadly and said, "Now, tell me, how was your journey?"

"Our journey was fine and we have not come for some work of ours, but to know more about your work". Hearing our answer she laughed and said, "My work is nothing so great !"

"How can you say that, you are an MLA, you have been a minister, working with Baba during the satyagraha you have been to jail."

All right, I have done some little work. I'll tell you from the beginning. My name before marriage was Damayantibai Girdhari Dongre. I was born on 21st May in the year 1935. We were three sisters and three brothers. My father, Girdhari Dongre, ran a tailoring business. My father and mother were both in the Ambedkar movement, they always went to meetings, they took part in social activity. When I was just six months old, my mother, Krishnabai Dongre, and my aunt, Sundarabai Rodge, went to

Gandhiji's ashram in Wardha and held a satyagraha in order to press for some of their demands, so my mother used to tell me.

There was always talk in our house about Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's work and leaders of the movement would constantly come and go. I grew up in this atmosphere. My father and my uncle, Rodge Mama, told me that Baba's first meeting in Nagpur was held in the Bhandar mohalla. Both of them were major activists in the movement. In 1953 I was secretary of the Siddharth Primary School Teachers Association. After the conversion of 1956 I began to work in the social, educational and political field for the All India Scheduled Castes Federation. The Republican Party was established at this time. I was convenor, Nagpur division, for the All India Republican Party.

Shantabai Daani from Nasik, Ishwaribai from Andhra and I from Vidarbha toured the whole of Maharashtra working in the religious, economic, social, educational and labour-related fields through the medium of Mahila Mandals. Chandrika Ramteke, Draupadibai Donde, Jaibai, Nagdive, Shanta Sarode, Gangubai Mahajan and others came with me to the villages to preach Buddhism. We would go to each village, establish a Mahila Mandal, and tell the women what the conversion was for, and that Baba's last wish was that the whole of India should be permeated by Buddhism, that we must absorb the principles of Panchasheela, adhere to the 22 vows, and so on.

We would tell them why Baba had given us Buddhism after having studied several religions. We put special stress on the question of women's responsibility in the matter.

Sarubai Ambade consecrated a figure of Bhagwan Buddha in the vihaara at Hinganghat. Dadasaheb Gaikwad was present to inaugurate the image, and I too made a speech at the meeting.

At Sirasgaon in Marathwada untouchable women were stripped naked and paraded. On that occasion we took out a march of fifteen to twenty thousand women in Nagpur and demanded of the government that the culprits be severely punished. Nehru was Prime Minster at the time. Our demand was granted and the accused were convicted.

In 1964 the satyagraha of the landless was carried out under the leadership of Dadasaheb Gaikwad. I took part in that satyagraha and I was in jail for 15 days. We were treated fairly well in prison. But hundreds of women with babies as young as six months tied on their backs were also in prison. They were not given milk. Some prisoners were given good food, while others were not. Ailing prisoners were not given treatment. To demand these things I went on a fast in jail for four days. Since I was a leader I was classified as a first-class prisoner, but I did not accept this. Demonstrations for the landless satyagraha were coming every day, the agitation was going on all over Maharashtra. It became difficult to deal with so many people. One day I was taken out from there and stuffed into a barracks where murderers convicted under Clause 302 were kept.

In protest the women threw stones and clods of earth and rang all the bells, until they had to remove me from there. Such was the unity, the organised strength of the women. It goes without saying that the satyagraha was successful.

To make the marches and agitations in the *zopadpatti* (slums) successful, I, Bhivaji Badge, Jaibai Baagdive, and several other women had to carry out a number of struggles. One day the police came to bulldoze the slum. They used tear gas. I was a teacher at the time. I came running out of the school myself, and with about a thousand women from Indora, formed a line. Women had come with infants on their backs. Some were pregnant. We took out a line march from seven in the morning till noon. When the demonstration reached the Collector's office, the Collector stopped the demonstration, gave orders to fire, arrested us and jailed us for a fortnight.

I was a teacher from 1955 to 1967. In 1967 I fought elections for the Legislative Assembly as a member of the Republican Party and lost by 1500 votes. But I got the largest number of votes among all women candidates in Maharashtra.

From 1969 to 1975 I was a Corporator in the Nagpur City Corporation. During this period I served as a member of the Social Welfare Advisory Board for six years, and for three years I was a

member of the Welfare Board. I was also Programme Advisor to All-India Radio for three years.

I was a member of the Family Welfare Board and the City Vigilance Committee. In 1984 I was elected MLA from the Congress Party. At present I am secretary of the Congress Women's Wing. I became an MLA on 7th March 1985 and a minister on 4th June 1985. I was a minister till 13th March 1986. During that time various portfolios like social welfare, forests and forestry and legal affairs were given to me.

I was in the forefront in a demonstration with innumerable people in the Marathwada University Renaming Movement. The police stopped the demonstration near the radio station, and burst tear gas shells. They did not spare the women and children. In an attitude of revenge the Hindu police beat us up mercilessly. I got three strikes of the baton. At that time we took shelter in a nearby bungalow belonging to some persons from Bengal. We were ten or twelve women and about twenty children.

The police followed us there and carried on the beatings. The bungalow-owners were alarmed and they shut their doors. I thought, I am going to die here because the police rounded us up and they all began to beat me because I was the leader. I took a lot of hits on my shoulders. The children too were beaten. These were the powerful strokes of young, able-bodied policemen. In the end I shouted loudly, "Stop it, it's enough, we haven't done anything." One policeman heard my words and he recognised me. On that occasion the police made no concessions for children or the old.

A youth was helping an old man to get to the side of the road. They surmised that he was a leader and beat him so badly that his bones were broken. He was in hospital for four months. The name of that brave young man is Bhourao Shankarrao Gaikwad. Later his injuries mended.

All this happened at half past four in the afternoon. My husband, not being able to see me anywhere, searched for my name among the list of the dead. He did not find me there. A rumour had spread that I had died.

After that incident an all-party committee was set up. I

belonged to the Indira Congress. I held a satyagraha. I staged a sit-in at the district office for four days demanding that the injured should be given compensation. It is a blot on Indian culture that whenever there are riots, the police beat up women mercilessly with their batons and sticks and some commit rape. They must be severely punished. Policewomen should be used for action, not policemen. These were the demands we made.

I am a worker of the Congress Party. I have worked and am working on a number of different committees.

I have been a member of several committees such as the Maharashtra State Workers' Reform Council, Vidarbha Housing Board, All India Radio Programme Advisory Board, Sanjay Committee for the Destitute, Social Welfare Advisory Board, Maharashtra State Nagpur Peace Committee, Vigilance Committee, Women's Service Committee and others.

I have also been a member of the Nagpur Municipal Corporation. I was Joint Secretary of the Nagpur Remand Home. I am president of the Oppressed Women's Service Association. I have been vice-president of the Workers' Panchayat in the Nagpur Municipal Corporation and the Ramabai Education Society.

27

Laxmibai Kaakde
(Age: 75)

We met Laxmibai Kaakde in the Konark Housing Society in Pune. Laxmibai was a fair complexioned old woman of slight build, aged about seventy. A face pale because of illness, light eyes, she had a habit of wagging her finger when she talked.

My husband was a packer in the post office. I was married when I was very young. My mother-in-law had many children. My husband and his mother harassed me. I was not educated, but I had a liking for studies. I had heard about Babasaheb from my childhood. When I got married a gentleman named Abajibapu from Saswad was living next door to us. He used to tell us about Baba, and so I began to feel that I too should do some social work. Also, at my parents' home we used to celebrate Ambedkar's birthday.

I realised that if I wanted to go outside the home and do social work I would first have to be free of household responsibilities. So I underwent a tubectomy operation as soon as I had borne two children. When I became pregnant for the third time, I tried to induce an abortion, but it didn't work. When I began to suffer pain, I was taken to a lady doctor named Tilakbai. I told her I didn't want the child. "Why don't you want it?", she asked. I said, "I don't want to hide a sin, but I want to do social work." The lady doctor said, "You need your husband's permission." I said, "Fill up the form and give it to me, I'll get my husband to sign it." At the time I was already in hospital. My husband used to come and see me in the evening. He was addicted to alcohol. He came there drunk. I said to him, " Do you want your child or your wife?" He said, " I want you." I said, "Then sign this form." He signed and then I had my operation.

After the operation I was ill. My husband took good care of me. He gave me milk and eggs to eat every day. He brought soup made from goat's hooves to give me strength. My husband was very good to me.

However, I could not avoid the responsibility of cooking. My mother-in-law had no practical sense, besides, she worked as a sweeper in the municipality. I had to look after her children and my own. So although I could put a stop to having more children I couldn't escape from the stove.

I started a Mahila Mandal in Bheem Nagar. I took women along on a march to demand a united Maharashtra together with Bombay. The women's conference of the All India Republican Party was held in Bombay in June 1960. Ten thousand women were present.

I inaugurated the conference. Mrs. Suman Bandisode was chairperson of the welcome committee. A report has been published in the Republican Weekly of 13th June 1960.

When India was attacked by China, I took part in the effort to organise sending money and other assistance to the soldiers from the women's side. I also took part in the campaign to erect a statue of Dr. Ambedkar. We made efforts to preserve the unity of the Republican Party. We sent a petition to Indira Gandhi asking that Buddhist students be given concessions.

When the Panshet dam burst (in 1964) I helped in giving food, clothing and shelter to the flood-affected. When there were communal riots in Pune in 1965 I helped in establishing a citizens' peace committee.

I like very much to go and listen to speeches. But to stop me from going my mother-in-law would entrust all her children and mine to me and say, take them along. And so I really did take them along with me. I would carry food and water with me. When they said they were hungry I gave them something to eat, when they was thirsty I gave them water. If they wanted to relieve themselves I would dig a trench there and sit them down. I would have water for washing with me. If they started fighting among themselves I would give them a thump. If they cried I would shut their mouths and make them quiet. And while all this was going on I listened to what I could.

Later when I myself went outside the home to do social activity my mother-in-law and people around would tell tales to my husband. "Your wife doesn't behave properly, keep an eye on her." My husband would quarrel with me, beat me, keep a watch on me.

The activists would ask me, "The next meeting is at such-and-such a place at this time, you will come won't you?" My husband would be hiding nearby overhearing this conversation. Then when he came home he would say dirty things to me, beat me. I would say to him, "Kaakde, catch me doing wrong if you can. Don't suspect me without any reason." But he would not listen. Then I would threaten to go back to my parents' home. But I never actually

went. My feet were tied because of the children.

Babasaheb was to give a speech at the Ahilyashram. I took all the women of Bheem Nagar with me and went there. I touched Baba's feet and asked him, "Baba, why did you not bring Mai?"

"She didn't come. I asked her to come," Baba answered. Then I went to the microphone and cheered for Babasaheb. The women applauded me. The activists of the movement are appreciative of women working for the movement.

At the time of the Hindu-Muslim riots we tried to keep peace in Bheem Nagar. After four days a peace committee was set up. The socialist leaders S.M. Joshi, N.G. Gore and Mohan Dharia were on the committee. I said to them, " You have come here to keep peace four days after the riots. I calmed them down on the same day." To which Mohan Dharia replied, "Kaakdebai is like the Rani of Jhansi."

Apart from such words of appreciation, I, a woman working outside the home, was often looked upon with suspicion by society. When Baba's statue was put up, I handed over all the money to the lady chairperson, but she accused me, "Kaakdebai didn't give me the money, she put it into her own pocket." I stood for election from the B.C. Kamble faction of the Republican Party. The community did its duty. Since two Mahaars were up for election, they voted for both of us. We both lost.

I don't discriminate between my son and daughter. I educated both of them, but they didn't get very far in school. I feel that my daughter and daughter-in-law should do social work but our community is eaten up by factionalism. A good worker isn't allowed to last. I was dependent on my husband and served the society, but my efforts didn't bear fruit.

28

Shantabai Sarode
(Age: 61)

When we went to Nagpur we heard a lot about Shantabai Sarode from Sudha Ramteke, Chandrika Ramteke and others, and we were eager to meet her. The lady was a wrestler. It was said that she had been to prison many times on murder charges. When Sarodebai stood in front of us and took our hands in her massive hand, we were aware of her strength.

Tall, broad-framed, dark-complexioned, her hair tucked behind the pallav of her nine yard sari, and tied in a big bun behind, she had the habit of saying, "Tell me, then" at the end of each sentence.

Oh, Mai, what kind of education did I have! My father entered my name in the school. But in those days Mahaars and Maangs were thought to be big polluters. The telis and kunbis sat inside the class, while we daughters of Mahaars had to sit outside in the dirt and the mud. We had to take in whatever we managed to hear. But we would get bored. Then we would go out into the fields and wander about. One day an old man from the village told my father, "These girls roam around in the forest, there is danger from thorns and scorpions. Don't send them to school." That was enough to put an end to our going to school.

My father had an akhada. In the afternoon we put the little ones to bed, ate our bhakri with a bit of onion, and went there to do sit-ups. We were about nine or ten years old. In the morning my father would be exercising in the *akhada*. We would hide outside and watch him through the window. Then we copied his actions. We got down into the red sand and had wrestling bouts. One day my brother saw me and told father.

Father said appreciatively, "If they have a taste for it, let them learn. They'll become strong and tough." From my childhood I was bold, headstrong, free-spirited and hardy. It pleased my mind to wield the sword, spear, and shield in the akhada. I set my mind to learning it all. My body became strong. I began to wrestle against men. I had a mischievous temperament.

When I reached the age of fifteen, I was married off. My husband was fifteen years older than me. After we were married we both went to my husband's sister's place in Dhamangaon. During the ritual presentation of a coconut to me, the new bride, at the *malguzar's* place, I accidentally knocked against a big mud *raanjan* holding water to drink. Seeing that I had touched the pot, the *paatil's* wife said,

"Where did you bring her from? Doesn't she understand caste? How will she behave, living with your brother"?

I felt very angry and I threw down the grains of wheat (given with the coconut) which were still in the folds of my sari and they fell all over the courtyard. When I went home my sister-in-law tore me apart.

Of course I had experienced caste distinctions at my father's place in Dorli earlier. There were different stones down at the river for kunbi women to wash clothes, and different ones for the Mahaars. I purposely washed my clothes on the kunbis' stone. Four of them came running in a trice and said, "O Maharani, have your eyes burst or what? Can't you see it's the kunbis' stone?"

"Who are you calling a Maharani? So what if I washed my clothes there? Pour water on it and make it pure." "What a useless woman it is" they said. When they said this I ran and clutched the hair of one of the women. I hated to be called a Maharani, it made me angry. There was a fight. There were four of them but I, alone, was a match for them. Then my father-in-law intervened and ended the fight.

It was my nature to retaliate whenever some injustice or atrocity took place. Grown-ups told me, there is a great scholar and leader Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, has been born in our community, we must go with him.

Having suffered sorrow after sorrow in the Hindu religion, tired of being insulted and oppressed, on the 14th month in the year 1956 Babasaheb changed his faith and gave Buddhism to all. Hundreds of thousands of people took initiation. We did too.

But the upper-caste people in the villages boycotted them (the converts). They stopped their means of livelihood. They harassed them so that they would not get water. An incident occured in the village of Khaatkhed. Dalits weren't supposed to touch the well. The kunbis weren't drawing water for them. The Mahaars had to wait. They wouldn't give them water for hours at a time. Kumbhare and I went along with others.

I touched the well (khiradi) . "Who are you?" They asked "I'm a Maangin" I said. "What've you come here for?" They asked "To deliver the patil's daughter's child !" I replied.

When they heard that the well had been polluted, a number of persons turned up with weapons. I warned them, "Just try and touch me and I won't rest till I've killed three or four."

So we had two opposed groups, untouchable and caste Hindu. Then Kumbhare and Avale arrived. They instantly called a meeting. The police came. There was some reading and scribbling and they gave the well to us. High up on the cattle shed they wrote the name of Shantabai Sarode.

Later, whenever there was an instance of injustice or violence against untouchables—in Chhapewada, Borgaon, Deni, Salbardi, in Darhwa tehsil in Yawatmal – people would come to call me. They would pay the cost of the horse and cart. Then I would go. In Deni village in Yawatmal district when the untouchables converted to Buddhism the caste Hindus boycotted them. Our people used to cut grass and sell it. The caste Hindus stopped giving licenses to sell the grass. People began to starve.

Then I, Khobragade, Tarabai Meshram, Gavai, Bhaisarebai and others went to Yawatmal *naaka* to the Forest Officer.

We asked him, "Our children are starving. So we became Buddhist, is it a crime?" Eighty or ninety women had sharp sickles in their hands. I was in front, and they were behind me. Just as I squatted to cut the grass, two motor-cars arrived. I spoke to them

civilly. Then they issued a government order that from today the Buddhist women will come here to cut grass, nobody is to stop them! So that was the end of our misfortunes.

In Rawalgaon too we were troubled by the practice of untouchability so I went there. Near Indora in Nagpur in the Teka area, a Muslim man pointed to Dr. Babasaheb's portrait and uttered insulting words, and there was a riot. The police record says that on that occasion I committed five murders, look it up if you don't believe me! That time I went to prison for 13 months.

In prison lots of people used to come to look at me. They would shout, 'murderer of five, murderer' of five. In those days I was always seeing red. If anyone molested my sisters, if anyone said anything about my Babasaheb, my blood would boil.

In prison the woman watching over me said, "Eh Mhaarni, did you touch the water?" 'So I ran at her and gave her a beating'.

I have been to prison eighteen times. When they came to knock down the huts of the poor they caught me and took me away three times and put me in jail three times. In Nagpur at the time of the renaming march the police did a lathi charge. There was firing by the police. Near Alochhaya in Indora one man died. One man died near the Bardi hill. The police beat the women badly, they were injured, they fell ill. I wanted to go to Marathwada for the Long March. But whenever anything happened the police shut me up so how could I go? My heart breaks for Babasaheb.

Since we left the Hindu religion and took the Buddhist faith following Babasaheb, a revolution has come about in us. Now whenever there is injustice, we men and women get ready to fight together. We fight back with self-respect. If they beat ten of us we give it back to them no less. Baba taught us to retaliate as much as we could. In Buddhism there is no caste, no discrimination, no 33 crores of gods. We have only one object of faith, Bhagwan Gautam Buddha. He treats everyone equally.

And Dr. Babasahb Ambedkar gave us inspiration. I will never in all my life forget our debt to him. Every Buddhist must take pride in our religion. We must hold to the principles of the Panchasheela, we must become bearers of pradnya, sheel and

karuna. Those who give up Buddhism are impotent. Some educated women are ashamed to speak Babasaheb's name, they change their names. I say we ignorant women are better than you. We have strength, devotion, spirit, we have anger against injustice, we have the daring to go anywhere, speak anywhere. You are educated, you just guide us, like the rudder guides a boat, that's enough. About twenty of us women often go to the villages to preach Buddhism. 14th April, Ambedkar's birthday, the day of conversion, these are our big festivals. Buddhism gave us new life. To preach the faith vigorously is our duty.

On 2nd August 1987 in Avhane village in Jalgaon district the Shiv Sena collected 250 to 300 persons and attacked the dalits. They cut off the arms and legs of one man with an axe and threw him into the fire. They burnt down the houses of over 50 dalits. Did Shivaji Maharaj ever say that they should do this? These pimps are shameless. In the paper from Pune (17th September 1987) it is printed that because five dalits stole grass and fodder the Hindus forced them to eat excrement. They collected 300-400 persons and committed this inhuman act in front of them. I don't understand. Are we in independent India or still under English rule? It is 40 years now but the atrocities against dalits don't stop. It makes my blood boil.

We took out a demonstration in Nagpur on this issue. Hardas Tembhurne and 7 to 8 others took a deputation. We said, conduct a proper inquiry and give the dalits justice. I will fight for the community until I die.

29

Babytai Kamble
(Age: 60)

We had seen Babytai Kamble on the occasion of a book publicationceremony. We had heard that she had written her autobiography entitled Jina Amucha *(The Way We Live). She also wrote poetry and had done work in the Ambedkar movement. With this information we set out to interview her and reached Phaltan via Pune.*

Babytai has a small grocery shop in the Buddhist district in Phaltan. Babytai sits in the shop and does her reading and thinking there. When she is inspired to write she goes inside and does her writing.

Babytai, with her short stature, darkish complexion, attractive face and long hair, is a woman who has reached the age of sixty and she dresses simply. Looking at this woman with a plain washed sari, simple blouse and her pallav draped always over her head, one would wonder, is this woman even able to write a letter? She is simple in her attire and rustic in the way she speaks with a Kolhapuri accent, but her writing is Puneri and her style from Satara – this sums up Babytai's character. When we visited her Babytai was attending to customers in her shop. She closed her shop at once, took us to her house next door and began to talk.

I was born in 1929 on the thirteenth day of the month of Ashwin.[1] My father's name was Pandharinath Thekedar. I was married in 1943. Nobody asked my preference at the time of my marriage. In those times, even if the boy had no job, the elders would fix up marriages as soon as the couple was of suitable age. That's how my marriage took place. The boy is good looking, that's

all I was told. I did not suffer harassment from my mother-in-law but my husband did harass me.

My husband was of a suspicious nature – from the moment I got up in the morning, it was: 'don't look at anybody'; 'don't walk with your head raised'; 'why are you looking there?' Two months after I was married I left for Bombay with my husband. He went to look for a job there. We both set off for the Sonpur Chawl where my woman cousin lived. At Grant Road we got into a tramcar. In the car there were several Muslims and other persons also. Seeing me sitting there with a veil pulled over my face, hanging my head, they must have said something among themselves. I had curled myself tightly into a corner, but the inevitable happened and as soon as we got down from the tram, my husband hit me hard on the nose. I got a sharp pain in my head and blood began to flow from both my nostrils. My whole sari was soaked in blood. We reached my cousin's place like that.

Her husband saw the whole situation and said, "You don't stay here, catch the eight o'clock train and go back to Pune." Saying this, he put ten rupees for the rail fare into my hand. Then we finished our meal and in the evening got on the train to Pune. But my husband beat me as much as it was possible to beat me, all through the night. His question was, why did your cousin's husband give you ten rupees. The men folk of those times used to play with the lives of young girls without reason in this way. Sometimes I would be so tired of this harassment that I felt like committing suicide.

In those days parents did not save up anything for their children. The two of us started with nothing. We ran our household and educated our children. For this I had to labour day and night. I suffered every kind of sorrow. It is as if the life of a dalit woman is caught between the blades of a scissors. When working in the fields we have to fear for our modesty and at home we fear our husbands. I ran a vegetable shop. Not a single day of my youth was spent happily. Beatings, quarrels, crying and starvation — these were routine. I was convinced then that a dalit woman is really insecure.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had come to Phaltan when I was a child. The speech I heard then is fixed in my mind. "Get educated: eat less but educate yourselves. Unless you are educated you will not lift yourselves up. Hinduism has until now shut the dalits up in the darkness of ignorance, in the framework of the four *varnas*, but through education you can make progress." I followed Baba's advice. Even in those adverse circumstances I studied up to the seventh class and made my son a graduate. I behaved according to the Buddhist principles of pradnya, sheel and karuna.

I have three sons and three daughters. My eldest son attained a first class every year of his six-year M.Sc. (Agriculture) course. Now he has completed his L.M.N. and is regional manager in the Bank of India. My second son is a B.A. and he also works in a bank. The third is doing his L.L.B. All my three daughters completed the tenth standard and are now running their homes. I did not discriminate between my sons and daughters. I taught them not to waste a moment of their lives, to put every moment to good use.

When I was at school, we schoolchildren would have arguments about Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar. Later when I got married and came to my husband's home I came directly into contact with the movement.

My husband used to go to meetings on dalit movement issues and later I, too, began to go. My husband's word was law in our home. But he never objected to my taking part in the Ambedkar movement. He was not in government service, we had an independent business. When there was a satyagraha, or a meeting, we would keep the shop closed. Then we would both take part in meetings and demonstrations. When we came home there would be quarrels and arguments, and I got beatings too. But by now this was a usual thing, I had got used to it.

I wish to say this about the work that Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar did for the uplift of the dalits: Mahatma Gandhi was a social reformer but since the sorrow of others is coldly felt, he did no more than to blow on the pains of dalits from afar. To one who is in great suffering even a breath of sympathy gives some satisfaction. But Babasaheb tried to pull out that pain itself from

the roots. "Only when you are born in that race can you feel the real pain"—by this law, Babasaheb attacked untouchability.

Gandhi believed that women should take part in the struggle for independence. But Babasaheb set out the Hindu Code Bill. The followers of Gandhi opposed him vehemently and boycotted the Bill.

A person who goes by the guidance of the Buddhist Dhamma respects all women like his mother and sisters. When young dalit men come together on 14th April and in December on the Chaityabhoomi at Dadar or the Deekshabhoomi at Nagpur, the restraint with which they behave in the crowd is a mirror of their minds.

The main difference between dalit women and other women is in their basic needs. Since dalit women have to leave their homes for their food, clothes and shelter, they have to struggle to preserve their modesty. Other women can earn money by making eatables like pickles and papads at home. Nobody buys such products from dalit women. A poor woman from another caste who stays at home is more secure than a dalit woman, this I can tell you from my own experience.

We always get different treatment as women. Whenever an institution is established in our community, only men are chosen to be in it. The women have done more effective work than them. They bring about the work of the party. But they are forgotten when the time comes to constitute the executive committee.

At the time of the Marathwada University renaming struggle, we took out a demonstration here in Phaltan. The women of our basti and some young boys were in the demonstration. Because I and my daughter were in this march, some ten or twelve goondas came to my house and they started to beat up the men and women around. When my daughter and I came out of our house, they beat us with sticks. I had a fracture in my leg and I was in bed for a month. This injustice was never atoned for because the number of dalits was small and that of the others was large. Since might is right we had to keep quiet.

At present I am advisor to an association of Buddhist youth. I feel that my daughters and daughters-in-law should do social work. I do not impose my views on my daughter-in-law. There is an incident I wish to relate in this connection.

When my daughter-in-law came to this house after her marriage, she saw at once that there were no images of the old Hindu gods here. There was only a photograph of Babasaheb and an image of the Buddha. So she brought three stones from the river and began to do pooja to them. I explained to her, "We are now Buddhist, our behaviour should be according to the 22 oaths of the Buddhist faith." Saying this I took those stones back to the river. After some days she brought some more stones, and put haldi and kunku on them. Again I explained to her and put the stones back in the river. The third time she set out *supari* — betel nuts — and started to do her daily pooja. This time however I did not say anything. But after some days she herself picked up the betel nuts and put them in the river, and now she goes even further than me in respecting Babasaheb, believing in the Buddhist religion. It is my opinion that relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law should be cordial. Now I am quite satisfied in regard to her.

On the whole I have a great dislike of superstition. From my childhood I saw things happening around me like giving one's own child to the potraj or leaving a girl to become a murali, torturing a daughter-in-law in the name of god under the pretext that she is possessed by ghosts, spirit-possession, and pushing an invalid towards death's door by giving him rustic treatments instead of taking him to a doctor. I detest all these practices. It is partly because of this feeling of disgust that I wrote the autobiographical book, *Jina Amucha*. The persons around me, the society in which I lived, that society and those people appear in my book. An American lady, Maxine Bernson (we call her *mavshi*, aunt), gave me a lot of encouragement to write this book. I am satisfied that I am doing something for people's awareness though this book.

I have also written some poems in which I have roundly attacked superstition. I have written satirical verse —

God's garden is blooming, a brood of fifteen or more
It's God who gives, and that's our fate, this is the wealth the god has given us.
The rich one who bring a cartful of offering don't get the gift of a child
Keep my child safe as you would a stone, a brood of fifteen or more.

A number of critics have written reviews of my book, *Jina Amucha*. The subject of my book has reached the people through radio and television. Rather than being called a writer, I would like to be called a servant of society through my writings and the work of raising social consciousness that I do.

These days the terms servant of society and activist have gained a bad reputation. The reason for this is that, after Babasaheb, we have not had any ideal leader, all of them have split selfishly into factions. That is why a community that could once take great leaps like a lion, has become like a she-goat, and is subject to injustice and oppression. But Baba's thoughts still continue to guide us and we get inspiration to act.

Even now, if all the organisations of dalits and Buddhists come together and work in a united fashion, Baba's movement will move ahead with force and we will make progress. I believe that only in the Buddhist faith will our path lead to success.

Endnote

1. The thirteenth day of the month of Ashwin is the beginning of the Diwali festival; also known as *Dhanatrayodashi*, where *'dhana'* means wealth and *'trayodashi'* means thirteenth.

30

Seetabai Thakur
(Age: 70)

My maiden name was-Seetabai Appaji Kamble. My father used to sing bhajans (religious songs) to the *ektara* (one-stringed instrument). That was his means of livelihood. My father studied up to the third standard in Babasaheb's class. My father used to say, "Baba is ours." But we didn't understand who Baba was. The time when Babasaheb sat in a tonga and came to Ramabai's samadhi, my father bribed me with a paisa coin and shooed me round to the back. Then I stood looking from far off. That was the first time I had a darshan of Babasaheb.

We were twelve brothers and sisters: seven children of my first mother and five of my second mother. We were poor, so none of us went to school. My father married again when my own mother died. My stepmother gave me a lot of trouble.

When I was quite young I had an illness to do with my monthly period. Then my father's sister brought a match for me, a man who was in the military named Sundarram Thakur. I was married off because it was not considered auspicious for a girl to die unmarried.[1] But since I did not bear any child they got another wife for my husband and I separated from him. I began to live with relatives.

When I lived in Pune I liked singing. This gift came from my father. I occupied my mind with that. The songs my father used to sing were Hindu religious songs. In the beginning I too sang those.

For the occasion of the conversion my father wrote a song :-

The drums are beating in praise of Bheem
Take the flag of equality in your hand,
Come forward one by one, say victory and move ahead.

Now everyone has heard the news
What never was before—
Today we have all gained a shining diamond,
He whose father is Ramji,
The light has spread and darkness is hidden,
So says the poet Appaji to you all.

When I was in Pune, we learnt that Babasaheb was to come to the Ahilyashram and I went along with everyone. Dadasaheb Gaikwad, Shantabai Daani, Rajbhoj and others were there. So everyone got up and greeted Babasaheb with applause. There was a Mahila Mandal run by Vithabai Kadam of Bheempura and Bhikabai Khedkar of Nana Peth, I went to the Ahilyashram as a part of the Mandal. Whenever there was a function anywhere, I used to sing, so Vithabai asked me to sing. In those days we used to sing any old songs.

When I had a darshan of Babasaheb from up close it really filled my heart. Shantabi Daani made a speech. Seeing her on the stage I felt that I too should become like her. Then I sang a song. The song that I sang was by the poet Devanand.

Then I took inspiration from there and began to sing myself. I went along with my father to various places to sing songs. People liked them a lot. To awaken the people, this became my work. Then I began to feel that rather than singing songs that others had written I should write songs myself. Then I decided I needed an education. There is no progress without education. I started to go to an adult education class, and soon I could read and write a little. From what I heard here and there I began to write songs. The first song I wrote was in praise of Babasaheb.

Come let us altogether praise him,
Let us praise the son of Ramji
The one who made us drink
The water of Chavdaar tank, in Mahaad,
Breaking all chains, in satyagraha.

This song brought me a lot of fame and also began to earn me money. I could live on my earnings from singing. And from the

strength and encouragement that gave me I went on writing more:

Diamond, a diamond he is, the Kohinoor diamond
My dear Bheem was one in a million
Let the praises ring loud all round.
The great Bheem wrote India's Constitution.
Pandit Nehru, Rajendra were with him
The real law minster that India needed,
My dear Bheem was one in a million.

and

Bheem stood under a peepul tree.
Baba saw the god Buddha.
Took the wheel of faith in his hand,
Made revolution in our land
Baba saw the god Buddha and he gave him his faith.

I began to compose verses like these.

After the conversion I would go and sing wherever Ambedkar's birthday was being celebrated. My father had become old so I sang by myself. With women like Vithabai Kadam, Bhikabai Khedkar, Sainabai Chavan, Baijabai Gaikwad, we set up a Mahila Mandal in Ganj Peth and we would go to sing everywhere.

Let me narrate a story that happened after we had returned from the conversion in Nagpur. Even earlier, I had never been religious, but when we were living in Sadar Bazaar in Satara, my father had taken all the pictures and idols of gods and pooja cloths and thrown them in the Krishna river. All of us sacrificed our gods because we had changed our religion and we no longer believed in the old things. When my father died, there was a temple of the goddess Laxmi near Satara which had belonged to our family for four generations. In the past we used to do *pooja* there and observe all the traditions, but after my father died I spread a sheet over the image of the goddess, held a condolence meeting for my father and stopped doing pooja.

Now the Marathas of the village do pooja to the goddess. Earlier they used to practise untouchability, but now they do not. They eat with us now.

The year after the conversion I came to Bombay. I came as a guest of my niece. I stayed here, and I used to do programmes. A Buddha vihaara was built at Worli. Then I again started a *bhajani* group. Drakshabai Bansode, Tanubai Pathare, Saakrubai Chandanshive, Shardabai Avhade and others are in the group.

We go to places like Chembur, Thane, Jogeshwari, Andheri, Matunga Labour Camp, Kalina, Kamathipura in Bombay. We sing the songs of other poets and my own songs. Since 1947 I am the main composer and singer-activist of the Worli Buddha vihaara.

Now I also give speeches. People praise my work. When an Equality Memorial column was erected in Rehmatpur and there was a function, and later Prakash Ambedkar came to the place of the Bhimabai memorial, he presented me with a sari. My work is honoured in this way in various places.

I am satisfied about this work of mine and it is my wish that my life should be spent in this work.

Educated women should impress the religion of Gautam Buddha on their children's minds.

The government has recognised my work, I get Rs. 500 a month from the government.

Endnote

1 Seetabai here refers to a tradition whereby the body of an unmarried woman is to be tied to a single bamboo pole in a hammock and taken to the cremation ground — explanation given by the authors.

31

Shashikala Dongardive
(Age: 52)

My maiden name was Shashikala Bapurao Ghate. My married name is Shashikala Dongardive, my home and the community is my field of work. I was married in 1948 at the age of 12. My husband's name is Sahdev Bhivaji Dongardive. My parents' home was in Kavathe village in Akot tehsil. Kavathe in Murtijapur tehsil was my husband's home. In those days nobody asked a girl what her feelings were, so there was no question of taking my preference into account. I was the only daughter-in-law and my mother-in-law treated me well. My husband did not trouble me, rather I had his co-operation when I went to do social work.

The family was fairly well off. When I was young I went with my mother-in-law to work in the fields and I also went to school. In 1952 I failed in the matriculation examination. My father was a schoolmaster. I wanted to go to the normal school for teacher's training. My father even filled up the form. But my mother-in-law was opposed to my being educated further, so my education ended there. I had only one brother, he is Assistant Commissioner in the Police department.

I had such a love for school that from the fourth standard I walked four miles to and from school, that is, eight miles every day. In 1944, when I was still a schoolgirl, we as daughters of Mahaars did not have the right to drink water. Someone would pour water from above and we would drink it from our palms. The girls in my class said to me, "This school is not in your village. So why do you tell them that you are a Mahaar's daughter?" But it did not suit my mind to tell lies. We wore nine-yard saris in those days, they would

get all bunched up. Ever since the satyagraha at the Chavdaar lake in Mahaad took place in 1927, my parents never entered a temple. We were not allowed to enter the temples, but there had already been a revolution among us in that we never even looked at the gods from far off. My father was in those days a leader among our people.

In Kavathe village we had a lot of trouble over water. There was so much casteism that crows, dogs, bullocks, could all drink at public watering places but Mahaars and Maangs would pollute the water.

When the water of the river dried up (in the summer) the untouchables would dig for water in the sand on the banks. But even there the caste Hindus would pile up excrement. They made our already burdensome lives even more difficult. Then our blood too would boil. We were toiling hard, and they were harassing us, so, often, we used to retaliate. The people of four villages in Akot tehsil — Kavathe, Asegaon, Saavra and Punda – were united and organised and so we were able to retaliate successfully.

Once it was ten o'clock at night. Empty sacks of cotton belonging to the paatil were being returned to Punda. In front of my father's house a wheel came off from one of the bullock-carts. That was because the wooden pin that fixed the wheel had fallen off. The driver of the cart said, "The pin is over there, bring it". At which the other man in the cart said loudly, "They're Harijans, they won't give you the peg."

All of us girls and our father's sister, Venutai Thorat, heard these words. We went into the house and said, "The people in the cart are abusing us as Harijans." Within ten minutes my grandfather and about forty or fifty people from the basti came there with sticks and told those people, "Hari' means god and 'jan' means people. We are not Aharijans. He who loves god is a Harijan. We don't consider ourselves Harijans so why do you call us Harijans?"

They were afraid when they saw our organised attitude and they said, "This is the effect of habit, we said it by mistake." The untouchables replied, "From now on change your habits." I then understood the importance of organisation.

We were Mahaars of the Mahaanubhavi sect so my mother-in-law observed its rituals strictly. We did not eat fish or meat at all. Even the children of the house were not allowed to touch her. They would have to drink water from cupped palms, and so our neighbours thought that we were Brahmins and so when they talked to us they would quite naturally abuse Mahaars and Maangs. Hearing this we would burn with anger. We would become aware of how much bitter poison about our Mahaar caste was filled in their minds. This would affect me and I felt like blurting out my caste. But of course I also felt afraid that then we would have to leave that house.

In 1964 the satyagraha of the landless was going to take place in Nasik. I had a great desire to go for this satyagraha, but I was pregnant at the time. I couldn't bear the sight of food, so I had become very weak. So my mother-in-law wouldn't send me to the satyagraha, and my husband also wouldn't give permission because the neighbours would come to know.

I, for my part, held out obstinately. I coaxed my husband and in the end he too decided to go to the satyagraha. We told people at home and outside that he was taking me to my parents' home and we went to Akola for the satyagraha.

When the demonstration reached the tehsildar's office in Akola we satyagrahis were arrested. Even after we were arrested we shouted slogans loudly.

Those slogans were ringing in our ears for three days. Some of the arrested women had their children with them. Some had brought along their chickens in baskets. These chickens were their only property and they were afraid that someone would steal them in their absence.

So pregnant women, women with infant children and some women with their chickens and their baskets were all crammed into the police van. The women, the children and the chickens made such a racket that one didn't dare speak a word. That hullabaloo also didn't leave my ears for the next week or so.

Some of the women packed into the jail didn't have any oil for their hair and their locks were tangled and matted. Some were in

rags. Yet the women were singing: -

My first verse I'll sing for Bheem
I'll be in the satyagraha and I'll see him
My second verse for him
Who gave us the right to draw water
For him, bai, we're happy in this van.
My third verse is for Ramai's lord,
He made all the people like a happy bride.

In this fashion, with rousing songs and cheers for Babasaheb our van reached the Nasik jail.

In the morning we were given rice gruel and a lump of jaggery for breakfast. For our meals we had vegetable dishes with all kinds of leaves thrown in together with their stalks, and half baked bhakris made of blackish grains (millet). We swallowed it somehow with water. But other than this business of the food we were not treated badly in jail.

At present I run a Mahila Mandal with 150 women in Ulhasnagar near Bombay. We celebrate the birthdays of Savitribai Phule, Ambedkar, the Buddha, and 6th December(Ambedkar's death anniversary) etc., and through this I try to raise the consciousness of the community.

32

Chandrika Ramteke
(Age: 61)

Nagpur is a hub of the Ambedkar movement, with a large number of activists, where women as well as men have been in the movement in large numbers. The men are in the forefront in all spheres, in education, in the gymnasium and the akhada. Women are also there, in education they may equal the men sometimes, but the idea that a woman takes the lead in the akhada roused our curiosity. We heard that Chandrika Ramteke did this and so we made it a point to meet her. She began to tell us :

I was my parents' only child and brought up with great fondness. My father had an akhada. He had wrestled as a hobby for years. He was known as "Badmash Raama" (Raama the Rascal) in Indora. He had also earned a name for fights and beatings. In my childhood I used to go along with my father to the akhada. Because of his encouragement I too learned to wield a baton, throw a spear, handle a sword. I did exercises so that my body became strong.

Once Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar came to our basti and asked, "Where is Badmash Raama's house?" My father said, "I am Raama." Then Babasaheb talked to him. He must have heard about my father's work in the community. He had a meal with us and left.

I was about eleven years old. In Indora there were two factions: Bhandar mohalla and Kamthi mohalla. The Bhandar faction had Sripaad Vastad as its head and the Kamthi faction was led by my father. There were always fights and quarrels between the two. Once, when my father was out of town, Sripaad Vastad's men caught hold of me at 2.30 in the night and tried to take me away. When I cried out loudly, my mother Sundarabai picked up a sword and ran at them. Seeing her warlike attitude, they fled. They had intended to defile my honour to score off my father.

That day my mother saved me but the incident rattled me. So I had to be on my guard always when I went to school, etc. Seeing this state of affairs, my father got me married to the nearest available bridegroom while I was in the ninth standard. I was married in August 1947. My husband's name was Tarachand Ramteke. His first wife had died. He had kept a second mistress and I was his third. From the start he began to harass me. He would get drunk and beat me up, keep me for hours under the dripping eaves in the rain, he'd say that I shouldn't go to school. I would bind 500 beedis every day and then go to school. Later, I began to work in the Khobragade faction of the Republican Party. I went wherever

there was injustice, in order to ask for redress, facilitating conversions for those who wanted to change their religion, holding meetings to demand concessions or the implementation of rights from the government, making speeches: this was the kind of work I was doing, and for this I had to leave the confines of my house. For this my husband troubled me a great deal.

One day Khobragade came and said, "There is a meeting, come along." After he had gone my husband bolted the door and beat me badly. "You go there to find husbands," he accused me. This became an everyday affair, but I took no notice. I kept on with my work.

Once there was a big riot involving two political parties, some murders also took place. Sakharam Meshram and Kumbhare were involved. I went to the Maskasath basti with the flag of the Republican Party yelling slogans for Babasaheb Ambedkar. They were trying to stop people from voting so that our Republican Party wouldn't get votes. So there was discontent, fighting and arson going on. In the folds of my sari I had a bottle of kerosene; matches, and a bit of chilli powder in a piece of paper. I would say I was going to the toilet, light a fire, and come back quietly. Someone would shout, "Your house is on fire", and people would be running about in panic. Then we would cast our vote. If anyone stood in our way I would throw chilli powder in their eyes. The police formed a cordon around the women, with spears. Then I took on a warlike aspect and declared, "Beware if anyone harms the women!" Seeing my posture and my agility nobody dared to try and catch me.

While I was working in Baba's movement I became even more daring and courageous. Babasaheb's work was like that, people wanted to throw their lives into the struggle. The movement made me firm in my purpose. I was already brave, my mother's turbulent blood was in me, and so I was determined not to accept defeat in any situation.

When the conversion took place in 1956 I went to the villages several times to spread Buddhism. Very often about ten or twelve of us women would go together to hold meetings. Damayanti

Dongre, Tarabai Meshram, Vatsala, Kausalya and others were with us. We used to tell people not to worship the old gods, to observe the tenets of the panchasheel, to be righteous, to keep strictly to the 22 oaths, fast on the day of the full moon, read in order to understand the eightfold path, and read at least a few pages of Ambedkar's *The Buddha and his Dhamma* every day. I and some other women among us were teachers and so what we said had an impact.

When Morarji Desai was Prime Minister we had all taken out a demonstration for the rights of the landless. More than 100 women went to jail. On that occasion Mr. R.S. Gavai did not allow me to go to jail, since the task of keeping the women together had been given to me.

I went with Kumbhare, Gavai and Dadasaheb Gaikwad to Delhi to demand that Buddhists be given the concessions granted to dalits. We courted arrest by crossing the river Yamuna, five women at a time. At that time we were arrested and put in the Tihar jail. I said to Morarji, (in Hindi) "You have not granted any of our demands," upon which Morarji said, "Who had asked your Babasaheb to become a Buddhist?" We were angry. I said, "You do not even know how to speak to a deputation."

In Erangaon they beat an untouchable so badly that he died. We went there also. Injustice and violence against the poor keeps taking place. Whenever I am called for, I go. I have been to jail many times. I have also participated in the Renaming March.

During the time when Vasantrao Naik was Chief Minister of Maharahstra, I lay down on the ground in front of Indira Gandhi's car. Indira Gandhi said, "Do you want to die?" Later she called for me to meet her at the Governor's house. I explained our grievances. "In Erangaon the Hindus beat one of us dalits to death, will this kind of atrocity continue to occur in your raj?"

Indira Gandhi listened to all I had to say. The case against the Erangaon culprits began in court. Later, they were punished. People do not look kindly on a woman who does public service. She has to go about among men, she has to carry on her work without paying attention to what people say. She has to be very careful in

her behaviour. People would say of me, "Beware of her, she is fire, fire." I was very sharp. I was a teacher for twenty years. Men and women should jointly look after the responsibilities of the kitchen. Everyone would like to have a plate of food placed ready before them. If women got served ready meals, they would go further than men in doing social work and they would be more honest.

33

Jayabai Bhalerao
(Age: 68)

We were wandering around Matunga Labour Camp for about two hours asking where Jayabai Bhalerao lived. We walked through the dust and garbage with an incomplete address in our hands, trying small lanes and alleys. But there were a lot of Bhaleraos.

"Which Bhalerao? The one who lives alone, who funds charity meals at the Buddha vihaara?" "The one who runs a hotel?" We were perplexed by these questions; all we knew was that she was the activist Bhalerao.

On a side of the road a group of five or six women sat together picking lice out of each others' hair. When we asked them, they scratched their heads and directed us along a path with many turnings. Finally we stood in the front yard of a chawl and saw Bhaleraobai herself sitting at the door of her room in the chawl.

Wearing a nine-yard sari, with the pallu draped over her head, a lovely little white kitten on her lap, looking as if it lived on Jaibai's love, so tender was her face. Even at the age of 68, she had a strong build and she was quite tall. We could imagine that she must have looked really sturdy when she was young. Her face was shadowed by loneliness.

We stepped forward, and told her, we wanted to speak to her. Jayabai got up from her place and asked us to come inside.

In the inner room there was a huge canopied bed that spoke of Jayabai's having once been well off. A few pots, portraits of Babasaheb and Bhagwan Gautam Buddha set high up on the wall. Next to them was a framed photograph of an ascetic with beads round his neck and ashes smeared on his body. 'Who is that?' we asked. "That is my husband" she said. And she went on, "Before the conversion my husband used to read religious texts on ritual occasions. He would smear ashes on his body, wear tulsi beads around his neck and sing keertans *in the Hindu tradition, keep fasts and chant prayers. After his conversion he gave up all that. He got this photograph taken of himself as a* buva*—a holy man—as a souvenir of old times. And I have kept it there as a photograph of my husband, it is company for me." Having said this the lady was silent for a while and then changed the subject and began to talk about herself.*

My home before marriage was at Koral, tehsil Kopargaon, district Ahmednagar. We were five children: three brothers and two sisters. I was the youngest.

My parents were both illiterate, yet they tried to give their children an education. They would do wage labour wherever they got it, in the field etc. I went to school up to the fourth standard. My brothers and sisters went to school for a couple of years and then stayed home. They could not study further because of poverty at home. Then my father died, and my mother had to bear the burden. I began to help her with housework.

In 1933 when I was fourteen years old I was married to Janardan Bhalerao. My husband had been married before. His wife was living and he had an eleven-year-old son. He did not get on with his wife. The quarrels reached a peak, the husband beat the wife. So she took her son and went back to her father's place. She filed a lawsuit, and my husband also went to court. Then the caste panchayat granted the couple a separation.

After that my husband married me. As my mother could not support all of us, she gave me away thus as a second wife. My husband was educated up to the seventh standard. He used to take contracts for masonry work in the village, and he also had some land of his own. My mother approved of this and gave me to him in marriage.

Five years after I was married, I still didn't have a child. Also, my co-wife's son was with us. She left her son and went to live with her parents. I felt sorry that mother and son had been parted in this way.

My husband's anger with his first wife had by now cooled down. I thought that in any case I had not borne a child, and I really didn't want children, as I had by now decided to take part in social activism. I had no interest in cooking; so I went to my co-wife and said to her, come and live with us. Her relatives said, we won't send her unless her husband comes himself. I sent a message to my husband asking him to come, and stayed at my co-wife's parents' place for five days. I was treated well there. My husband came and said he would take back his first wife. Then we returned home with my co-wife.

She came to stay and, just as lightning streaks between two clouds, quarrels began between the two of us. Of course my husband never said a word to me. I was educated, and what is more, I helped my husband in his business like a man. I ran an eating-house and also sold betel leaves. My co-wife felt jealous. She would pick quarrels on any pretext.

For some time I felt, all the people in my husband's family are illiterate. I have no child, and moreover, my co-wife is there to look after my husband. I felt that I should go back and stay in my father's house. But my husband wouldn't let me.

In 1934 we left the village and came to Bombay. We lived in Sion Koliwada. My husband took contracts for building reinforcements. In 1936 we rented a room for four rupees a month from the municipality in the Matunga Labour camp and we all began to live there. In 1937 my husband got a job in the Parel

Workshop. My co-wife had two more children. In 1944 I got a job as supervisor in a factory which used to be there in the British days, manufacturing wooden goods, doors etc. I had a salary of 52 rupees a month.

Once the English sahib pointed at a piece of wood and asked me, "What is the length of this wood?" I told him in my broken English, "this is 12 square feet", because it was a piece of wood three feet by four feet. I made a guess. The sahib was pleased. He said, "Increase this woman's pay by four annas." I was very happy.

Later on I worked as supervisor in the municipality water department at Tulsi Lake, Powai. In 1950 I left that job too and stayed at home. In Rahuri Koliwada we had a restaurant and a paan shop. I would sit behind the counter in the restaurant and in the paan shop.

As I sat there I heard about Babasaheb and I felt I should hear Baba's speeches, and should see him, and work in my own way to make people aware.

There was to be a four-day conference in Naigaon, and Baba was to come. I went to the conference every day. One day there was rain. Baba said to the people assembled, "Don't be afraid, wait, don't rush off. If you are afraid of a little rain, what will you do when the enemy comes?"

I went to the speeches on all five days, they impressed me greatly. I felt, when Babasaheb is with us, we should not turn back. We must teach our children good values, make progress in ourselves and come up in life.

In 1954 we started a Mahila Mandal. I was the vice-president, Sakhubai Pagare was president, and Draupadibai Gavali was secretary. The work of our association was to mediate in quarrels and fights, and to get Babasaheb's thoughts to the people.

At home our economic situation was good. We owned two lorries. People used to know me as *hotelwali, lorrywali*. Meetings about conversion took place in Nare Park, Worli Grounds, Bhoiwada and other places. Baba had his office at Jerbai Wadia. I used to go there. Women contributing to Baba's work used to get

encouragement from their families. The menfolk would co-operate.

My husband did not object to my going to meetings and programmes. But the women in the neighbourhood would say, " She doesn't have a child, so it's all very well, she gets up and goes." In the beginning this would hurt, but then I got used to it. Earlier I used to read Hindu religious texts with my husband. People would ask me to read them aloud. I would read and also explain their meaning. The people liked this.

After the conversion I read *Gautam Buddha and his Dhamma* in the Buddha vihaara. I attend initiation ceremonies and children's naming ceremonies. We recently started a Mahila Mandal. The name of our association is Mother of Buddha Mahila Mandal. The Mandal is registered at the address: Labour Camp, Ward No. 3, Chawl No.2, Room No.2. This association holds readings and commentaries on religious texts and also runs adult education classes at present. We are looking for a place to run a sewing class. We women observe the Buddhist *varshavaas* for four months in each year (during the monsoon season), when there are daily meetings to hear readings from Ambedkar's *The Buddha and his Dhamma*. We donate money and food. We serve meals to about five hundred persons.

When I hear that injustice has been done somewhere, I feel angry, but for lack of money we cannot help. To tell you the truth, this is now the task of educated earning women like you. You take the lead, we are right behind you.

After my husband died, my children didn't give me anything. They took charge of the hotel, etc., I live alone at home. The women of the chawl look after me, my relatives from my parents' side ask after me. I do not think that somebody else or society should take responsibility for me, because I do not want to be a burden on anybody.

Girls, women should study, do religious and social work. I respect the old Bharatiya Bouddha Mahasabha (All India Buddhist Council). It is a great happiness to go on doing something for the society.

34

Geetabai Bhagat
(Age: 55)

We first heard Geetabai's name when we went to Nagpur. Of medium build, darkish complexion, neat and attractive in appearance. Geetabai was a widow. When we told her the purpose of our visit, it was as if we had lifted the lid off a pot of boiling water. The sorrows in Geetabai's soul burst out like steam as she began to speak...

My home before marriage was in Bhingaryachi Dorli village in the Katol tehsil. There was a lot of casteism in the village. My father's name was Shibalji Shendre. He entered my name for school, but the kunbi's children practised untouchability. They teased us, harassed us, gave us water by pouring it from above, sometimes they hit us. We had to sit far from others in class. So we began to be afraid of school. My father told the schoolmaster, " The kunbi boys beat the girls, scold them". But they didn't listen to the master; they had their way. We would be beaten one day and stay at home the next four. In this way we gradually stopped going to school. Then I used to go to the fields with my mother. I helped in the housework.

I was married at the age of twelve or thirteen. My husband was a *kotwal*–a traditional village servant–he drank a lot and used to beat me without reason. I was at the end of my tether. Once as I served him his meal I said, "Why do you drink so much?" "Is it your father's money? I drink from what I earn myself." Saying this he beat me so badly that there was blood everywhere. In my anger I went to the police paatil. He was someone I knew, of the kunbi caste. He had a family. I was soaked in blood. Fearing more beatings,

I stayed at his place all night. He wrote out a report. He sent a kotwal to accompany and wrote in the report at the police station that I had been badly beaten, that I had small children and if I died it would be my husband's responsibility.

Then both the policemen came with me to the dispensary. I had three stitches in my head. They took my husband to the lockup (prison). All the people of the village, Mahaars and kunbis, began to talk: "What a disgraceful wife, she shuts up her husband in jail." To which I replied, "This isn't all; whoever stands bail for my husband will also be punished." At that moment the courage of my ancestors had entered me.

After three days I went with my youngest child to the police station and got my husband released. Officer Jadhav said, "What is this? That day you were soaked in blood and now you are standing bail for your husband?" "What can I do sahib? The daily wage for men is a rupee and for women it is only ten annas. I can't run the house on my earnings so I had to come."

Then the sahib reprimanded my husband: "If you're such a great fighter go out and show the men, why take it out on your wife. If she dies what will happen to these small children?" "No sahib, I'll hold my ears and swear: from now on I won't drink." And he did sit-ups in front of the policeman.

Then I took him home. Once back home he began to argue even more. The neighbours egged him on: "What a wretch your wife is, kept you in jail for two days and then brought you home. In your place I wouldn't have let her stay." Then my husband came home drunk again that night. He picked up an axe and ran at me. But my son came in the way and he ran away. He didn't come home all night.

I stayed on for a few days more suffering this torture. Then with the support of my husband's elder brother and my father-in-law I took the children and began to live separately. My husband carried on with his playing cards, prostitutes, the company of ruffians, selling things from the house to buy drink and so on. It was all a ruin. Then he would drink at night, walk around outside the house and say, "You so-and-so, you've kept my wife, I'll cut

you down." I stayed separately for four months.

Once more I made a compromise and returned to my husband. There wasn't even any salt in the house, forget anything else! He behaved all right for four days. Then he was back to his old ways. I thought, this can't go on, but I have to see to the children. In any case one has to work to live. So I took the hard decision to leave home.

My mother-in-law said, "She's gone to do bad things." The relatives said, "She's cut your nose off your face, disgraced you." The people said, "She's a bad woman." But I didn't listen to anybody. I came to Nagpur to my sister Sarodebai's place. My mother was also there.

At that time Babasaheb's movement was in full swing. Everyone was overwhelmed by Baba's work. The poets Nagorao Patankar, Krishna Shinde, Ramanand Gadpaile used to spread the word about Baba's activity. They told the people through their songs that they must give up the Hindu faith, why they should embrace Buddhism, stop the work of dragging off other people's dead animals. In other words, stop doing the work of kotwals, live with self-respect, don't spread old superstitions. I already had experience of doing the kotwal's work myself. Because my husband would drink till he was insensible and neglect his work, he had lost his job. Then even though I was a woman I went and asked for the post of kotwal, and began to do the work. But there too he would interfere and harass me. When I went to give the weekly report, he would suspect me, accuse me of doing bad things. But I had to suffer it all for my children's sake.

Then we were initiated into the Buddhist faith. But the Hindus in the village boycotted us. They stopped giving us work, stopped everything. The kunbis and the Brahmins were angry because we had stopped dragging away dead farm animals, and given up eating the meat of carcasses. An extreme boycott, we were in dire straits, at the end of our tether. At the time I was five months pregnant. ... Then we left the village.

With Sarodebai I took up social work. I began to go to meetings and demonstrations, Mahila Mandals. Once, when we had gone

on a march to Sadar Taakli, we were lots of people. They arrested us. They kept us in jail for one day and one night and then released us. In jail we were singing Baba's songs, loudly. We had a lot of fervour. We ate whatever we were given in jail, and shouted slogans for Babasaheb. One woman gave birth while we were in jail.

In the renaming demonstration more than a thousand women went to the radio station. We were shouting slogans that the Marathwada University be given the name of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The march was about five miles long. We were five women in each row.

When got near the radio station the march was stopped and there was tear gas, firing and a lathi charge. They beat us badly that time. My son was in the matriculation class. He was saying, " Let me go to the front. I must become a martyr now." Somehow we managed to control him. In Nagpur I went to work in a bungalow to earn my living. Two of my sons worked in a hotel for five rupees a month.

We went on doing social work for about fifteen years. When we held meetings the Hindus would throw stones at us but we overcame many obstacles like these. We had the co-operation of men from many families.

We organised the women. "Why are we doing this work? Whatever has been left undone in Baba's work, it is our duty to complete it." This is what we preached from door to door.

Conversion brought progress to our community. We began to live with self-respect. Because of poverty, my son drove an auto rickshaw while he was doing his L.L.B. He became a lawyer.

Now whenever there is a demonstration or a meeting, all of us from our house go. We don't give much importance to cooking. Men and women must do social work and housework together. But at least up to now the women have to do the housework.

Near our house there is the Anand Buddha vihaara. Bhante Surai Sasai says in his speeches there, "You are now Buddhists. Don't worship stones in the name of the mother goddess. Don't worship the Hindu gods Rama and Krishna. Bhagwan Buddha is our ideal."

After the conversion if a woman secretly worshipped the goddess, of three or four us would catch hold of her by the hair and make her fall in line. Earlier when we were Mahaars we have suffered a lot of oppression from the Hindus. That is why we have given up worshipping the old gods.

We learnt quite a lot from Babasaheb. We don't stand slavishness. I didn't have any ties to my husband. But we were wrapped up in Baba's work.

35

Chandrabhaga Jadhav
(Age: 55)

Chandrabhagabai Jadhav spoke at a women's conference during the golden jubilee celebrations of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Kanakavli conference in May 1988. She was a shortish lady, fair, a little stout, wearing a nine-yard sari and a big round kumkum on her forehead. Her aspect was determined and her style of speaking was also forthright.

We had heard a little about this lady before. She had been involved in some action to do with the river at Rajapur which is known locally as the Ganga at certain times of the year. (They say the Ganga comes to Rajapur.) During the conference there was no time to speak to her. But later we got hold of her and found out more about her.

My maiden name was Vithabai Govind Kamble. My father's name was Govind Goju Kamble. He worked in the municipality in Bombay. He lived in Karapit (Crawford) Market.

My native village is near here, Majalgaon, Rajapur tehsil. My father worked in Bombay and my mother looked after our farm.

We were four sisters. We didn't have a brother. My parents were in great sorrow because of this. We sisters used to work in the house and in the fields. We didn't go to school. Everyone at home thought, what is the use of girls being educated? In the end they have to tend the stove. So we never saw the face of a school.

My parents had the sorrow of not having a son, so they didn't have much love for us sisters. They decided to get us married off as early as possible and be done with it.

They got me married when I was twelve. My man was then twenty years old. He also worked in the municipality in Bombay.

I have three daughters and five sons. I made no difference between my sons and my daughters. We had suffered because we were girls. I educated my daughters, at least they learnt to read and write. My youngest daughter went up to the matriculation class.

Babasaheb was making a speech near Crawford market. I must have been ten years old. I heard the speech and I saw Baba. I don't remember the speech now.

After my marriage I lived in Bombay in Crawford Market. I was an ignorant woman so I didn't join the movement or anything but I used to go whenever there was a meeting and Baba was making a speech. He used to tell us to get educated. Educate your daughters. Keep unity among all. Whatever you earn, give at least four annas to the movement. On hearing such speeches, the people around us, Mahaars of those days, used to say all kinds of things. That we are to change our religion, we would talk of things like this. My husband's brother Sadu Kamalaji Rajapurkar was president of the Rajapur Tehsil Buddhist People's Association and so lots of activists used to come to our house, and they discussed all kinds of subjects. Hearing them and hearing about Babasaheb's work I used to feel that I too am no less than others. There is no reason to call us Mahaar and consider us inferior. If anyone treats us as lower than them we must raise our voice. That's what I felt.

You must know that the Ganga comes to our Rajapur. People come from really far off to bathe in the Ganga. They say it earns them the grace of god. They say, having a bath there does that.

In those days when we hadn't taken the Buddhist faith we were in the Hindu religion. We too used to feel we wanted to see the Ganga. Bathe in the Ganga. Of course our people (Mahaars) from far off villages used to bathe in the river but the Brahmins and their people knew us Rajapurkars and Mahaars from nearby villages, so we were afraid to bathe there. Two or three children went there to bathe but the Brahmins cursed them and drove them off.

I didn't like it. We might be Mahaars by caste but we no longer ate the meat of dead animals and we keep ourselves and our homes better than some others, so why this stubbornness that we can't touch the water of the Ganga? One day I got up and took my friend Airebai with me and we went round ten or twelve villages near Rajapur and collected men and women. We were about fifty women in all. All together we went to the Ganga. Then shouting loudly "Victory to Babasaheb Ambedkar" all of us together touched the water of the Ganga.

The people bathing in the river were staring at us but nobody said anything. Even the Brahmins were struck dumb. Then the children from our village got excited. They ran to the river and started to bathe.

From then on till we became Buddhist whenever the Ganga came we used to go there.

The Bombay people came to know about my action. In Karapit market in Bombay we started a Mahila Mandal in the panchayat office. I was the president. I felt there should be a Mahila Mandal in our village so I started one there. Recently I have set up a joint Mahila Mandal for the whole of Rajapur tehsil in 1986. We started our work at once, that same year. Padmini Jadhav and Vimal Jadhav were also there to help me. We women took the lead to erect a statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar in front of the Ambedkar Students' Hostel.

The work of the Mahila Mandal nowadays is to help out at weddings. If there is a meeting anywhere we gather all the women and go there. We speak in the meetings.

I always take the lead. Nobody opposes my work in my family. The people of our community also make much of me. They call me for speeches from villages far off.

Our people, our women are often attacked in various places. Hearing of this makes me very angry. Once they called me to the Ratnagiri (district) radio station to speak on this subject. I spoke strongly and I also spoke on this subject at the Lions' Club in Rajapur. But I can't manage to go myself to every place where there is injustice. Lack of money makes our strength fall short.

Educated women, women who have jobs, should do some social work after managing their housework. The superstitions that we had discarded are surfacing again in our community, we must try and get rid of them. After we changed our religion we immersed all our pictures of gods, statues, coconuts which were in the house, in the Ganga when the river came to Rajapur. We didn't feel bad or troubled in our minds or anything then, but the house did feel all empty. Then the people of our village placed statues of the Buddha in our homes and we swore to follow the principles of his dhamma. We live our lives according to that.

36

Shuddamati Bondhate
(Age: 57)

We had been hearing about Shuddhamati Bondhate. A woman who worked in Baba's movement, always in the lead in meetings and marches, whether for the university renaming, for concessions for dalit Buddhists or to protest against injustice.

We went to a dalit locality called Imamwada in Nagpur to meet her. She lives there in what you might call a fairly decent hut. She is comfortably off, wears a white cotton sari and a white blouse, is

short in stature, fair-complexioned and good looking. Shuddhamatibai greeted us with warmth. We gave a brief account of our purpose in coming to meet her. As soon as we mentioned the name of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar she began to talk to us with evident pleasure and quite freely.

I was born on 9th September 1932. I am the only child of my parents. My father was Arkudji Somaji Kamble. He was a social reformer. I was married in the year 1944 at the age of twelve. I had been to school up to the fourth class. My husband's name was Ramdas Bondhate. He was good looking but he didn't have a job. Later he got a job as a clerk in the D.A.G.P.T. My husband's family was uneducated. My mother-in-law said, "If you want to go to school ask your father to bear the expense". After I was married I stayed in my in-laws' home for five or six years. At that time my daughter Jyoti, was four years old and I was five months pregnant with my son Baban. After that, I never returned to my husband's home.

In my husband's house there were always quarrels. In the end I was fed up with his cruelty and I began to live in my natal home. I carried out my determination to study further. I completed the fifth and sixth standards in the Bhide High School, Sitabardi. After that I went to the Sevasadan school. Studying with me were Keertibai Patil (interview no.18), Kausalya Nandeshwar (interview no. 21) and Shanta Mate.

I was involved in Babasaheb's movement from my childhood. My father was an activist, he always took me along with him. The dalit movement took root in our minds from that time. In our basti, Imamwada, in those days women used to sing traditional verses*ovis* in all the homes. For example:

Ambedkar comes, the people say he comes, he comes
The king Rama stands up to greet him.

I too was present at the All India Women's Conference of 1942. After this conference, on Baba's orders, Samata Sainik Dals were set up in every basti. My father joined the Dal with great

enthusiasm. He had bought two copper bugles for the Dal at his own cost.

Early in the morning at five o'clock he would sound the bugle loudly. At that all the soldiers of the Dal would gather for a parade. The parade in Imamwada used to be held at what is now the Ambedkar Birthday Ground. There was instruction in drill, stick-wielding, hygiene etc. In those days all the boys and girls of the basti used to go into the Samata Sainik Dal.

Whenever Babasaheb came to Nagpur there would be large processions. I used to join in regularly, dancing and singing loudly with a blue flag in my hand. The fervour of those days was something else.

At first I was a bit scared. But going with my father to meetings, marches, speeches gave me self-confidence.

The conversion took place in 1956. Along with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and hundreds of thousands of others, I and my parents took instruction to convert Buddhism. We put away all our pictures of Hindu gods in the attic of our house. After some years they were cracked and broken.

After I passed my Montessori training, I began to teach the kindergarten class in a school run by the Nagsen Nagar Sporting Club in the Untkhana area in Nagpur. I was the first kindergarten teacher in that school. Even today I teach children from poor and uneducated families in the bastis for nominal fees.

My children are also involved in the Ambedkar movement. My daughter, Jyoti Lanjewar, is involved in Baba's movement and in social work. And my son, Baban, is always at the forefront in this field. I am very proud of him. Every mother should make her child aware of Baba's work, dedicate herself to the social welfare of her own community and set an example for others.

Since 1980 I am the president of the Samata Sainik Dal, women's wing, Nagpur division. Jyoti Lanjewar is secretary, Sudhakar Choudhary is the treasurer, Satyabhama Nagarare is the organiser.

Accordingly I have to visit several bastis, go to Mahila Mandals in areas like Khamla, Shivangaon, Kailasnagar, Bezhanbagh,

Gittikhadaan, Prabuddha Nagar, Trisaran Nagar, Sadar etc. I have to start new Mahila Mandals of the Samata Sainik Dal in some places, spread word of the Ambedkar movement and Buddhism, patch up splits in different Ambedkarite groups, give legal advice to women in case of any injustice or violation, dispel blind superstitions prevailing in the community. I am doing all these different sorts of work.

37

Sumanbai Bandisode
(Age: 55) (Deceased)

Sumanbai was born in the More family on 7th April 1918. Her father's name was Marotirao More. She was one of five sisters and three brothers. Her father was a doctor. Before her marriage Suman had studied only up to the Final, that is, the seventh standard. She was married to Sadashiv Bandisode and she went to live with her husband in Panchgani in Satara district. Her husband was a doctor. He was also a dedicated participant in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement and a social worker. He had great love for people of his community and in Panchgani he was known as Appa. He did not confine his wife to household chores but first educated her up to matriculation. Later, he began to take her with him to Babasaheb's meetings.

Sumanbai used to teach women from the Mahaarwada to read and write, give them lessons in hygiene and tell them about the thoughts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The Bandisodes were responsible for starting the practice of celebrating Ambedkar's birthday in Panchgani. Sumantai also did pioneering work in organising the Mehetar (Bhangi) community in Panchgani. Their traditional work was to carry "night-soil"–human waste–on their

heads. They were totally deprived of education and lived a slavish existence. Sumanbai started holding sewing classes for the Mehetar women in her own home. With sewing she taught them self-respect and awareness of their rights. She established a union of the Mehetar workers in the T.B. Hospital in Panchgani. She also acquainted the community with Dr.Ambedkar's work.

In 1935, Babasaheb stood for election for the first time. The first public meeting for election campaigning was held in Satara district. The opposing party had announced that they would beat up the first person who stood up to make a speech supporting Babasaheb's candidature. The meeting filled up with people. On the stage were a number of leaders including Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Bandisode and Sumanbai. There was discussion about who should be the first to speak. Sumanbai's eldest daughter (who is now Indutai Kamble) was then six months old. Sumanbai put down the baby and stood up.

She went to the microphone and said, "There is no need to think so much about who is to speak. Let me see who dares to beat me." She then made a vigorous speech. Those who had come to attack Babasahebs supporters ran away long before her speech ended.

Sumanbai and her husband took part in the 1946 satyagraha in Bombay to oppose the Poona Pact. Sumanbai had been a practising Hindu, but her husband was an atheist. In 1956 husband and wife were initiated into Buddhism in Nagpur.

Later, the couple moved to Bombay. Sumanbai played a significant role in setting up Mahila Mandals in various parts of Bombay, with women like Sakhubai Mohite. Sumanbai died on 10th March 1971.

38

Vithabai Pawar
(Age: 52)

Vithabai lived with her son in Kolkata. When we heard that she was coming to the Konkan to attend the Ambedkar Golden Jubilee celebrations in Kanakavli, we went to Tarale in the Sindhudurg district to meet her. We suggested that she should speak in the Maalvani dialect spoken in the coastal Konkan region of Maharashtra. She began to talk about herself in true Maalvani style. She said:

My natal home was Maayin, Kanakavli thesil, Sindhudurg district. My father, Baalu Tambe, worked in the docks in Bombay. We lived in Waadibandar in my childhood. We were five sisters and we had one brother.

We had a Mahaar Caste Mandal in Waadibandar in those days. Ram Sarandkar, Pandurang Mohite, Naadviskar and Kutroolkar were active members. These people said to me, "Hey girl, you do one thing. The Marathas have a Satyanarayan pooja.[1] You go there and pollute it. Then we will regard you as (a true follower of) Babasaheb Ambedkar." When I was a girl I was really bold. I went at once to the Marathas' Satyanarayan and touched it. That polluted it. The row that followed was resolved by saying, "Don't pay attention, she's just a child."

I heard Babasaheb's speech in 1952. There was a one rupee ticket for the speech. I saw Baba then. Some persons who belonged to the Samata Sainik Dal lived next door to me, and they taught me stick-wielding, drill and so on. Once my mother saw me doing this and she began to quarrel with them. "She's playing with you now; what'll happen to her when she gets married tomorrow?"

When there were speeches in school I used to take part. Once I took Baba's photo to school and put it up. Ram Sarandkar, Pandurang Mohite and those people gave me a prize of five rupees for doing this. Our schoolteacher wanted to adopt me, but my mother wouldn't hear of it. Instead, she took me out of school in the seventh standard, when I was thirteen, and got me married. My husband was 20 years old. He used to work out in the gymnasium, he had a hot temper. Once the *maamledaar* (village officer) said, "You Mahaars used to tear apart cattle carcasses." At this he gave the maamledaar a few blows and resigned from his job.

We went to Bombay in 1955. We lived in Wadala. I was very active by nature. As soon as we went to Bombay I mixed with old women who had come there from different places like Nasik and Beed. People from the B.C. Kamble faction[2] lived near us. I began to work with them for that faction. I worked with G.D. Ghonkshe, Sumant Gaikwad, Bhaiyasaheb (Ambedkar). We used to campaign during elections.

In one election Sumant Gaikwad was standing against Aaba Maalaadkar of the Shiv Sena. There was a a fight between the two parties at Kurla. Then we women (gives a long list of names) intervened. Seeing the women, the men of both the parties moved back. The issue was resolved.

We took out a march in Wadala in 1959 demanding there things: that the poor be given huts at least; that the huts be made over in their names; and that the residents' union be registered. Slum-dwellers unions from all over Bombay took part. They arrested us near Kaala Ghoda. I was six months pregnant at the time, so they wouldn't take me into the jail. I said, my child will be a revolutionary in future, I'll take care of myself. They served us meals in prison, but we didn't eat. We were afraid of being poisoned. We were sent our meals from home. I was in jail for four days. We refused the allowance given to prisoners. We said we were political prisoners.

There were meetings of women in Kamathipura, Seven Roads,

Parel and Bhoiwada.[2] Sakhubai Mohite, Suman Bandisode, Malatibai Hindalekar conducted these meetings. I made it a point to be present.

We took a demonstration of the Republican Party to the Bombay Central bus station to protest against bus fare increases. We were arrested at Madkebuva Chowk. We were put in the lock-up there for one night. We were bitten by bedbugs all night. With Manjulabai Pagare, Sonubai Jadhav, Anjani Ghonkshe and others I started the Rama Mata Mahila Mandal in Wadala. We spoke on organising women, education of girls etc.

In the town of Khalas (Nasik) the Marathas killed two untouchable brothers. We were to go to Nasik with Sumant Gaikwad and others. But we got a message from Shantabai Daani: "We will manage in our region. You take out a demonstration to the Secretariat." Later on, I don't know how the whole incident was hushed up. A suspicious atmosphere was created, we activists were disappointed. Organisations should be free of corruption. We women have many problems. Marrying two wives is common in our community. Because of this custom the first wife suffers a great deal. She doesn't want to go on living. She must be given some support.

In 1956 we converted to Buddhism in Bombay. Since I became a Buddhist I speak on Buddhism. Our people celebrate Babasaheb's birth anniversary. I make speeches on those occasions. I was clever as a child but it went waste because I was half educated and married too early. I wanted to become somebody. But I did what I could while managing my household. I feel sorry that women from our Kanakavli- Maalvan region don't come forward to do social service.

Endnotes

1. Satyanarayan pooja is commonly performed by the upper caste in Maharastra to mark important family events.
2. The references are to areas of Bombay city.

39

Sonutai Lanjewar
(Age: 60)

We went to the Indora Hut-Dwellers' Association in Mukundrao Ambedkar Nagar looking for Sonutai Lanjewar. We found her in a small two-room hut, the floor neatly coated with cow-dung. Pictures of Dr. Ambedkar and Bhagwan Buddha hung on the wall with garlands of sandalwood bark. Sonutai was wearing a spotless white sari and blouse. She was dark complexioned, of medum build and pleasant looking. She begin to speak to us.

Just then two youths came there on a motorcycle and said, "Bai, come at once, Gaanaar Sahib has called you to Balabhou Peth. The police have come to pull down the huts there. These poor people have been living there for the last twenty years, where will they go? As they started to break the huts 15 to 20 women lay down in their path to protest. And then the police beat them badly. Vatsalabai Meshram was in front, they beat her a lot too, and then took her away in a police van. They were going to touch the Buddha statue, but the women saved it by lying down in their way. It is a really terrible situation. Come quickly, this job can't be done without you, so they sent us to call you."

"Yes, we're coming. Where've they gone? Chandrika, Maya, come and get ready quickly. And bai, forgive me. We may be there till late in the night. But come tomorrow afternoon, surely, at four, yes." Saying this Sonubai went off. About ten minutes later, 12 or 13 women and four or five men also followed her. Two of the women had small babies with them, one was evidently pregnant.

Without uttering a word Sonutai had already given us a good glimpse of her work. The next day, however, Sonubai talked to us at length.

My father's name was Keshavrao Bagde. He was born in 1901. He had a liking for social work from his childhood. In 1938, Punjabrao Shambharkar and Aavale babu had started a society named the Satyashodhak Samajsevak Sangh.[1] My father worked with this society. His social activity started from then.

Earlier when we were part of the Hindu religion, since both of us were girls, my parents had made a navas–pledge with god–that if they had a boy the next time they would come to the jatra (annual religious fair) every year. Two or three years later they had a son, but they did not keep to the pledge because my father had changed his thinking after listening to Babasaheb's speeches and reading his articles in the Janata newspaper. He had decided to give up all the old traditional practices, and he behaved accordingly.

After I passed the eighth class I passed the teachers' training examination and took up a job as a teacher. But some years later a decree was passed in the Corporation that all teachers must appear for the matriculation examination. Then I did my matric. My father was a reformer. He would swear by Babasaheb's name, go to meetings and speeches, and discussions would go on. He was a strict follower of Babasaheb. In 1956 we were all initiated into Buddhism. When my father died at the age of 86, the words *Buddham Sharanam Gacchami* were on his lips.

I was married to Dharmaraj Lanjewar in 1947. He was in the Police department in Jabalpur. I have two children, a boy and a girl. I educated both of them. My son has a job, my daughter looks after her home, goes to Mahila Mandals etc.

After our conversion, my father and the rest of us took all the old pictures and so on of gods and goddesses and immersed (drowned) them in the Naag river in Nagpur. At that time, Jagobaji Ramteke, Phulchand Meshram and others from the basti were with us. They put the gods in a bag and drowned them in the river. At the time we remembered the atrocities we had had to suffer at the hands of those in the Hindu faith, and we felt happiness that we were now free from the hellish pains imposed on us by Hinduism.

I saw Babasaheb for the first time when he came to Lashkari Bagh in Nagpur in 1952. I heard his speech but don't remember it clearly now, I remember I felt his determination to reform society and from then on I decided to take part in his work.

In 1956, Baba came to Nagpur at the time of the conversion of 14th October. Before he changed his religion Baba said in his speech, "We must break the chains of this slavery. We must free ourselves from the oppression of the Hindu religion. For this, conversion is necessary." These words of Baba were impressed permanently on my mind and after his death I became the president for the Vidarbha region of the Indian Buddhist Council, and my work began from there.

My social activity had my husband's complete support. He encouraged me, and I took up organising because I liked it and I wanted to learn about Baba's work. While I was doing work for the Buddhist Council, Tarabai Meshram, Damayantabai Dongre (Deshbhratar), Chandrikapure, Sudhatai Ramteke, Geetabai, Sarodebai and others were with me. When the Council was established, Jaibai Chaudhuri was with me and she helped me considerably in starting Mahila Mandals, she gave me guidance.

In 1956, after the conversion, Babasaheb passed away. At that time I told my head mistress, " Our Baba has died. Give us a holiday." She was a Christian. She did not give us a holiday. "If you go without permission I will take action against you," she said. "A mountain of sorrow had fallen on our heads then. Even if we lose our jobs, we'll see what we have to do later," we said, and all of us women went to Bombay to take a last darshan of our beloved leader. I will never in all my life forget that huge mass of people crying out in grief.

In 1959 the Mahaar people in Aurangabad changed their religion and embraced the Buddhist faith. This event angered the Hindus and they made terrible attacks on the dalits in the villages, who were in a minority.

A sample of this torture was the gouging out of the eyes of the two Gavali brothers with a dagger in the village of Dhaakli in

Akola district in 1959. When we heard of this incident, I, along with Jaibai Chaudhuri, Draupadibai Ramteke, Dadasaheb Gaikwad, N.Shivraj and others went to meet the brothers. There were some persons accompanying us who were singing praises of Baba. When we reached there we consoled the family members. We gave whatever assistance we could. We held a meeting there. There were speeches against the atrocity at the meeting.

After this we went to Sindevaahi Bhandara, Raipur, Khairagad villages in Madhya Pradesh in order to do religious preaching. People had faith in Baba, the organisation was strong, there was unity among the people.

After 1956 I was the Vidarbha region president of the Indian Buddhist Council and I established Mahila Mandals in various places. These were: Gotala Taakli Mahila Mandal, Taakli, district Nagpur; Panchasheel Mahila Mandal, Ramabai Nagar, Tekasite; Sujata Mahila Mandal, Sindevaahi, district Chaanda; Gautami Mahila Mandal, Indora; and Pradnya Mahila Mandal, Rajapur, district Jagdalpur.

We went to all these places with Bhante Suraisasai in 1962. Wherever we went we established a Mahila Mandal. In order to prepare the women for conversion, we held meetings where we told them what the 22 oaths are, which are the Buddhist festivals, and what the observance of *varshavaas* means.

Now we gather in the vihaara at every full moon. We have a collective Buddha prayer, and we serve meals to the people. Among the educated, only 15 per cent of the women live according to Buddhist principles. But among the uneducated women it is 80 per cent.

When we heard the news of the murder which took place in Saavner village in Erangaon tehsil, we decided to go there. Tarabai Meshram, Saroj Khaparde and four or five other women had also come along. Some had six-month-old babies, some even brought along their tiny two-month-old infants. On a dark moonless night we crossed the river to reach the home of the people where the incident had occurred and we stayed there all night. It was there

that we learnt that Ramdas Naarnavare had been cut down.

Ramdas Naarnavare was a vigorous young activist of the Ambedkar movement. He had a proper house and a fair income from farming. The Hindu people kept a watch on him and one day 15 to 20 Hindus made a surprise attack on him. First they tied up his arms and legs, then they gouged out his eyes, and cut off his ears and nose. Because of the blows and excessive bleeding he died on the spot.

Eight days after the incident, when we came to hear of this, we reached his home. The police was keeping guard. They tried to prevent us from going in, but we were not afraid. They did not allow us to hold a meeting outside the house. Then on the day of *Pola*[2] we held a meeting.

Fifty to sixty people attended the meeting. People were terrified. They wouldn't come out of their houses. R.S. Gavai, and Gaanaar brought the case to light. The attackers were punished. But nobody could bring back the dead.

In the satyagraha of the landless in 1964 they arrested me and put me in Nagpur Central Jail for a fortnight. We were political prisoners. They treated us very badly in jail. The food was terrible.

In 1968, Damayantibai Dongre, Tarabai Meshram, Pramila Kasbe, Subhadrabai Meshram, Shantabai Sarode and hundreds of other Buddhist women took out a demonstration in the Indora slum. Bheemabai Shende, Chandrakanta Dahiwale and I, with the above mentioned women were in the deputation and we were in prison for eight days. They did not give us proper food in jail. The wardress behaved arrogantly. We did not get the soap and the hair oil we were entitled to.

When there was an agitation for a united Maharashtra we went on a march with Dadasaheb Gaikwad. We always took part in the satyagrahas, meetings and demonstrations.

In 1977-78 seven or eight of us women had gone to Jawahar Nagar in Bhandara together with Jogendra Kawaade to demand the renaming of Marathwada University. Prakash Ambedkar had come to Nagpur in the year 1980. The president of the Indian Buddhist Council, Meeratai Ambedkar, was with him. On that

occasion Meeratai gave an inspiring and enlightening speech.

Even now when there is violence against dalit Buddhists anywhere, we go there at once and assist the victims of the violence in whatever way we can, we console them and give them courage.

I have been in the movement from the days of the Satyashodhak *jalsas* and later on I dedicated my life to Baba's movement. I had taken part in the renaming marches in Marathwada together with Rupkantabai Dahiwale, Vimala Ramteke and other women.

When I was doing social work I had the support of my husband and the community encouraged me. I myself had a thirst for knowledge and a liking for Baba's work and so I worked in the movement. I feel that my daughters and daughters-in-law should take part in the movement.

Endnotes

1. Truth-seekers Social Service Society. The word "satyashodhak" is associated with the nineteenth century social reformer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule who was a sharp critic of Brahmanical domination in society. With his wife Savitribai, he was a pioneer in starting schools for children of the 'lower' castes, including girls in Pune.
2. An important festival in rural Maharashtra, occurring on the first day of the monsoon month of *shravan*. Cattle, especially bullocks are honoured on this day, with special offerings of food, garlands and colour.

40

Meerabai Ambedkar
(Age: 55)

We went to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's bungalow 'Rajagruha' in Dadar in Bombay to meet Meeratai. She asked us to come into the sitting room. This was Babasaheb's house; and so the curiosity we felt in entering it was next only to the eagerness with which we looked forward to hearing anecdotes about Babasaheb from Meerabai's own lips.

Wearing a washed white sari and a similar blouse, of medium build, fair complexion, round face, pleasing features, Meeratai was simple in her demeanour. She had a way of closing her eyes when she spoke. Meeratai began:

Really I have not done much work in the movement, and whatever I have been able to do has been after 1977. The reason for this is that the people in our family were all caught up in working for society. So naturally I was managing the household, teaching the children, and of course, since Babasaheb's social contacts were numerous, there were always a lot of people coming and going. Coping with all this meant it was difficult to take part in social activity. I did not have the time.

Still, being Babasaheb's daughter-in-law I consider it my duty, so I have devoted myself to religious work. I have no liking for the sphere of politics.

My maiden name was Meera Salvi. My father's was Vitthal Salvi. My father worked as a fitter in the railways. My parents were not well educated. My mother's parents' home was in Raigad district in the Konkan, in a village called Raavadi in Taasgaon tehsil. We lived there for two years. There is a railway junction near Delhi at Retaadi. My father had a job there. From there he was transferred to Karachi. We were three sisters and one brother. There were many families in Karachi. At the time of Partition we came to India.

I was married in 1953. I feel it is a great blessing that I became Babasaheb's daughter-in-law, I have great respect for Babasaheb. I feel proud of him as the leader of India's social revolution and the sculptor of her Constitution. Taking inspiration from Babasaheb's movement, from his life's work, I took up social and religious activity.

After Bhaiyasaheb's death I was appointed president of the Indian Buddhist Council and after that I undertook to tour villages all over on behalf of the Council to preach Buddhism and spread its influence. Accordingly I visited Nanded, Parbhani, Satara, Pune,

Delhi, Yeole and other places. I try to raise people's awareness through my speeches. Even though our community is divided into several small organisations, people regard Babasaheb as their ideal leader and become united when occasion demands, that is the situation today.

What is the Buddhist Dhamma? The subjects that I speak on are: the four truths, ten *sheels*, ten *paarmita* and the eightfold path etc., also the importance of the full moon in Buddhism, Babasaheb's life work and the advice he gave to women. Every woman, besides looking after the housework and children, must be able to go outside the house, she must be encouraged to do social work.

My friend Susheela Patkar and I hold a study camp for women every Thursday afternoon from 1 to 4 pm. For our religious talks we take up self-contained topics: What is the Buddhist Dhamma ? Who was Gautam Buddha? What are the principles of Buddhism? Which are the 22 pledges? We tell people about *varshavaas,* the Buddhist festivals etc.

Susheela Patkar is the secretary of the Mahila Mandal. Reading the Dhamma has a great influence on women. One woman who carried idols in a basket on her head from house to house asking for alms was so affected by hearing the Dhamma that she gave up this practice permanently afterwards. To become a *shraamner* one has to undergo training for ten days. Also a shraamner is educated about the life style, diet suitable for him/her, only after that does one become a shraamner.

I did not take part in the renaming agitation. I had made an oral appeal which was broadcast on All India Radio. Women's liberation means treating women with humanity and equality. In the last ten years men have become willing to help women with household chores. Slowly a change is taking place in men. From much earlier, Babasaheb used to tell women, "Do not regard yourself as inferior. Get educated and teach your children. Along with your household duties, take part in social activity, etc." I follow this and work as much as I am able.

41

Sudha Ramteke
(Age: 61)

Reading the name 'Saaphalya' (fulfilment) written on Sudhatai's house in Nagpur, we felt that her life must have been a fulfilling one, and that was indeed the case. Sudhatai had a fair complexion, slim figure, and an upright bearing. Wearing a nine yard sari, simple blouse, with her round face, a bindi on her broad forehead, she presented a pleasing personality altogether.

Well, was there a small number of sub-castes even within our caste?" Baarke, baavne, zaadebaavne, laadwan, aandwan, kosaare, katai... and so many others. These castes imitate the upper castes. They consider each other inferior. I had a good lesson in this matter in my marriage. I was from the baarkas and he the baavnas. This was the first time the two castes had dealt in daughters... there was stiff opposition from both sides. I was treated in an insulting manner. When there was a wedding in some other family, people at my in-laws' house and elsewhere would say, "Don't allow her to take part in the marriage rituals."They would keep me at a distance. My father too was afraid of being boycotted by the caste.

I studied up to B.Sc. (graduation in Science). I wore a nine yard cotton sari even in college, with the pallav over my head. This was what people expected, that a woman should always behave according to tradition. Our relatives and neighbours would complain about my education. They told my father, " If this girl gets educated and drops her pallav from her head to her shoulders when she comes before us, will you approve?" My father said, "My daughter does not even drop her pallav before me, why will she appear before you like that?" Even though I was a girl my father

educated me, he had seen that the women working for him had to do wage labour, they had to toil, and his own daughter shouldn't have to do that, she should be able to stand on her own (feet) and be happy.

From my schooldays I was treated in an insulting manner because of my caste. When I visited the home of one of my school friends, her mother would serve me meals, but then purify my plate by throwing cinders on it. Later, caste discrimination lessened because of the influence of education. They too needed us. I began to help my friend with her studies. They began to mix with me freely. My father was working in the mill so we were fairly well off.

My husband is a doctor. In those days in the villages we had to suffer because we were Mahaars. I could not get domestic help. We could not find accommodation in caste Hindu bastis. People would ask my husband for medicine in the form of pills, liquid medicine in bottles was not acceptable from him. They felt it would be polluting.

When I was six or seven Babasaheb had come to Kamathi. I went along with my father to get a glimpse of him. I was a member of a branch of the Samata Sainik Dal since I was quite small. Every morning we had to get up early and assemble on the grounds, do drill and practise stick-wielding. We women would do all sorts of exercises with the men. When there were meetings we would tie our nine-yard saris tightly and stand to attention. We would be in the vanguard in programmes like satyagrahas and demonstrations and so we nurtured a militant spirit from childhood.

In 1942 the Quit India movement against the British was resounding all over the country. At that time Babasaheb started an organisation called Depressed Classes. I had taken part in the discussions. The first conference of this organisation was also held in Nagpur in 1942 and a women's session was also held. Babasaheb established a Mahila Mandal. Sulochanabai Dongre, Keertibai Patil, Indirabai Patil, Jaibai Chaudhuri, Radhabai Kamble, Prabha Ramteke and other women were members. I was the joint secretary.

In 1954-55 a Women's Association was set up in Paachpavali. The association ran sewing classes for women, and a nursery class.

I was president of this association.

In 1956 the Dhamma initiation ceremony took place in Nagpur. On that occasion Chandrika Ramteke, Suddhamati Bondhate, Damayanti Dongre and other women supplied eatables to the people. I too was with them.

From 1956 I was a teacher in the Chokha Mela school. Later, a high school and a junior college became part of this school. I retired as headmistress of this school. While I was doing all this I was always conscious of my own social commitment. I never longed for fame or adulation in exchange.

Even today there is violence against women and we, that is, Pramilabai Daani, Kaashikar and others have established a Defence Association.

When the (Marathwada University) renaming agitation took place, we women teachers and peons from the school took part in the demonstration. When we went from Kamala Chowk to Indora Chowk there was a lathi charge, and a ten-year-old boy died. Sarodebai and other women were arrested, one of our women peons fainted.

Educated working women cannot give much time for social work. Yet they should have a social commitment. We go outside our homes to demand rights for our community, so we get encouragement from the society. When we go out to work there is a problem with the cooking, but cooking is an art that both men and women can acquire. In hotels men are the cooks. It is wrong to say that women like to cook and serve others. Every chore in the home is for men and women alike, my husband helped me a little with this point of view.

42

Sarla Mourya
(Age: 55)

When we went to Delhi Dr. Nimgade told us, "Some time back women had taken out a procession with images of Gautam Buddha and Dr. Ambedkar."

"Who are these women?"

"These are women from the Chambhar caste and they have embraced Buddhism as well." "Well then, we must meet these women." Dr. Nimgade said, "I only know their leader, Ganeshdutt Jalutriya's wife. I don't know where the other women live."

"Okay, it's the leader we want", we said and we went along with Dr. and Mrs. Hira Nimgade through the baking heat of the streets of Delhi.

Ganeshdutt Jalutriya was a talkative gentleman. When we explained our objective he began to tell us a lot of things himself. We said we wanted to speak with his wife. She was there too. Shortish, with a fair and ruddy complexion, her white hair dyed slightly reddish with henna, wearing her sari in the Gujarati style and tattoo marks on her arm. She said in a high voice, "What can I tell you? We are illiterate women."

We replied, "What does that matter? Even though you are illiterate you organise women for meetings and processions, that is important work. You are carrying on Babasaheb's work of spreading social awareness, that's why we want to interview you."

After we said this, Mr. Jalutriya's wife, Sarlabai, smiled and began to talk to us freely.

"My name is Sarla Mourya."

"Your husband's name is Ganesh Jalutriya and so how is yours Mourya?"

In our community a women's *gotra* – sub-caste or clan – remains the same even after marriage. The children however inherit their father's gotra. Our father and grandfather are from Rajasthan, but we belong here from birth. My father and father-in-law both belong here. My grandfather kept a shoe shop and my husband was in the leather business. In our community women wear the veil, purdah. Because it is the custom that we cannot look at the face of a man other than our husband I could not go to school. My brothers, however, went to school. In those days there were no separate schools for girls.

Earlier we lived in Devnagar. The Jaatav community there, that is, Chambhars like us, had become socially aware just as we had. They knew about Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's social movement and his life.

In 1956 when the conversion took place in Nagpur there was a great stir all over the country. Untouchables everywhere, Mahaars, Chambhars and those who were regarded as shudras embraced Buddhism. Actually the old Buddhist religion still has some influence in Rajasthan. There are some festivals that remind us of events in the ancient Buddhist age. For example, after Emperor Ashoka conquered Kalinga, his mind was pained to see the great slaughter of men. He later gave up his weapons and became a Buddhist. We remember this event through one of our festivals even today. On the day of the Holi festival we make small weapons out of cow-dung, like swords, shields and spears and then ritually burn them in commemoration of Ashoka's sacrifice of his arms.

Similarly, Ashoka's daughter Sanghamitra and his son Milind went to Ceylon to preach and we commemorate this in this way: on the third day of the month of Shraavan girls go to the river, strew flowers on the water and embrace each other with love.

These ancient customs and the Buddhist religion have a great influence on us. In 1975 both of us, husband and wife, took initiation from Bhante Nagsen. Later, our neighbours and other

people of the Ranguer community also took initiation into the Dhamma. Other people gave us and our children a lot of trouble over this, they teased and tortured us. But we paid no attention to them.

Those of us who had been initiated, started a branch of the Indian Buddhist Council in our mohalla. We collected subscriptions. An image of the Buddha was brought. But they did not keep their accounts properly. So we thought that we should start a separate organisation and keep a strict account of funds. So we set up our Delhi Indian Buddhist Council in 1965-66 and the organisation was registered in 1977. A woman named Hansrani Mourya works with me in this association. Not many women join, because of the purdah tradition.

Women are not supposed to go out of the house in our community. Beside this, because my husband encourages me, I do what work I can for Baba's movement as a member of the Delhi Buddhist Council. We celebrate Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's birthday and Buddha Jayanti every year. We then take out a huge procession. We hold various programmes, because there must be awareness among the people, people must contribute to taking Baba's struggle forward.

The Jaatav community takes part in political elections on a large scale. Politics is in their blood. But we Ranguers consider politics to be an inferior activity, so the question of campaigning for any party in elections does not arise.

Our Ranguer community in Rajasthan started an agitation to oppose bonded labour in 1976. The *thakurs* (landed caste) beat them badly, and tortured them in many ways, burned down their carts, and so on. Nanakchand Bouddha–who when he embraced Buddhism gave up his *akarneeya gotra* as well and started to write "Bouddha" as his surname–together with Chandrapaal Sahlani raised their voices about this violence in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly, and we were there with him.

The Buddhist faith which Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar has given us is great, and if everyone followed the principles of the panchsheel that have been given us, there is no doubt that all sorrow would

be uprooted from this world.

I did not go to school myself, but we educated our five sons and three daughters up to college. We did not discriminate between the boys and the girls in this.

I was much saddened and pained by one event in my life. We had built a Buddha vihaara here with great conviction. That vihaara was torn down by ruffians with Congress Party connivance in 1980. I realised then that it is most important to strengthen our organisations, for this, that we want to walk peacefully on the path of the Buddhist Dhamma shown to us by Baba.

43

Bhikshuni Nandasheela
(Devaki Chandrabhan Khandare) (Age: 65)

Just as Laxmibai Naik had become a bhikshuni, so too did an illiterate woman named Devaki Chandrabhan Khandare in Akola. Today everyone knows her as Bhikshuni Nandasheela. She was born in 1924.

After she got married she went to live in a small village called Aasra in Akot tehsil. But Devaki could not enjoy domestic happiness because her husband had contracted leprosy. Even after she came to know this Devaki remained in her in-laws' home because it was more important to stay and give support to her husband than go back to her father's house. She had a son, whom she named Anand. As soon as the boy grew up, her husband Chandrabhan died and soon afterwards, her son Anand also died of illness. Devakibai's world collapsed. The meaning had gone out of her life. Every moment that she was alive seemed to be was eating her up.

But Devakibai swallowed her sorrows and decided that if she was to live, it would be for others. She would walk on the path of

righteousness and go with others following that path. She absorbed the principles of Buddhism. She first understood what the Dhamma meant, and then sacrificed normal life to become a bhikshuni. She shaved her head, donned the yellow robes of an ascetic, and began to live in the Buddha vihaara in Akola. She began to spend all her time in reading religious texts, meditation, contemplation and preaching. People are impressed by her religiosity and they respect her, give alms and invite her for meals.

Once some bhikhkhus from Ceylon had come to Bheemnagar in Akola for a Dhamma meeting. They recognised her as a bhikshuni, gave her the name Nandasheela and praised her work. Nandasheela found the path to overcoming sorrow and she showed that path to others through her living. Following the Dhamma has made her life meaningful and valuable. It was through great determination and hard work that she achieved this and today she preaches the Buddhist faith. Her work is truly admirable.

44

Bhikshuni Chandrasheela
(Age: 69)

My maiden name was Chandrabhaga Chauthmal. My father's name was Abhimanyu Chauthmal. I was born on 5th December 1920. I was married very young, that is at the age of ten. I stayed with my parents for a few days and then went to live with my husband. After I reached puberty my husband used to beat me badly, he gave me a lot of trouble. So I left him and began to live with my sister. From 1939 I stitched clothes for a living. I was not treated well at my sister's home but since I had no other support I kept quiet.

Around this time I had heard Babasaheb Ambedkar's name. I

decided in my mind to join Baba's movement. There would be meetings in Akola from time to time and so I began to attend them. My schooling was up to non-matric. I began to read Baba's *Janata* and *Prabuddha Bhaarat*. I began to sing 'Bheem songs', and also to write a little.

My life was really sad but soon I made myself useful in social service, in solving the problems of the poor and dalits. I began to travel. Doing social service helped me to forget my personal sorrows. Just as I had started to do these things, I went to Nagpur at the time of conversion and I underwent instruction for joining the Buddhist faith. From then on I began to work for the Indian Buddhist Council.

After 1956 I began to work for the Republican Party. Around this time I wrote the play *Bhagwan Gautam Buddha aka Siddharth* and enacted it with a group of children.

In 1957 there was a three-day convention of the Samata Sainik Dal in Akola. There Mr. N. Shivraj presented me with a prize for my play and for my good work in the Samata Sainik Dal. In 1967, when I was still an activist and involved in party work, I resigned from the Republican Party, and with great conviction I began to preach the Buddhist faith. I went to Amaravati, Jalna, Murtijapur, Paratwada, Washim, Akola and other places to preach and I still go there when I am invited.

I shaved my head and donned yellow robes and at Ghoosar on 23rd March 1973 I was initiated as an *Anaagarika*. The bhikshus do not give instruction for shraamneri and so in 1975 I went to Bodh Gaya and underwent my second instruction in shraamneri under the guidance of the bhikshuni Shuzana, and became Bhikshuni Chandrasheela.

Some time later I met Bhadant Anand Kaushalyanji. The bhantes from Sarnath and Nagpur told me that bhikshunis should not wear orange vestments, but pink ones.

After this, when I went to Kathmandu to attend a conference, I began to wear light pink robes like the bhikshunis there. I do not want to be immodest. My living is pure and follows the principles

of Gautam Buddha. Just as one can lead a good life and gain mental peace by doing social service, the knowledge that one is helping to complete the work left undone by Babasaheb Ambedkar also gives one mental peace.

After we became bhikshunis, both Bhikshuni Nandasheela and I live in the Vishakha *vihaarai* in Akola. When there are invitations we go to people's homes and have meals with them, and when there are no invitations we beg for alms. We eat only once a day. We explain the philosophy of the Buddha to people in simple language. We explain to people the meaning of the eightfold path, the principles of *panchasheel*, *varshavaas*, *dahsparamita* and the scientific reasons underlying Buddhist festivals.

My life was spent in sorrow but having embraced the Buddhist faith my mind is satisfied.

14

Conclusion

"Kites rise against and not with the wind."
"The eagle surveys the sky against the direction of the wind."
"The rights one has lost cannot be regained by begging, one must fight fearlessly against those who have taken those rights away."
"Remember goats and sheep are sacrificed, the tiger is not."[1]

It was with such intensely emotional that words that Babasaheb awakened the minds of the untouchables.

When he returned to his motherland in 1920 after completing his higher education, Babasaheb first took up the task of liberating his brethren. Untouchables from Thane, Ratnagiri and Colaba in the coastal Konkan region were living in areas of Mumbai like Kamathipura, the Dagad Chawl and Lokhandi Chawl at Seven Roads, Horse Mews. They worked as butlers, drivers, mechanics, dog-keepers with English and Muslim employers.

Babasaheb started his work among these people. When he held meetings in order to enlighten them, they would sit chewing paan, smoking beedis and so on. "Who is this making a speech? Thinks himself a padre" they would say and make fun of him. But later on these same people, seeing Babasaheb's honest and sincere work for the liberation of dalits, took up his aims and objectives.

Babasaheb first awakened a consciousness of their rights and a sense of identity among the untouchables. He organised satyagrahas in Amaravati, Pune, Mahaad, Nasik. Women took part in these in large numbers. Touchable (high-caste) women like Mrs. Sahasrabuddhe and Mrs. Tipnis kept aside the constraints of caste and were courageous enough to help where they could. For example, in the Mahaad satyagraha they draped the untouchable women's saris in the Brahmin style.

The custom of leaving daughters "for the god" which prevailed in our community in the days before the Ambedkar movement was a cause of anger in the minds of women. The movement for the liberation of muralis and for giving up the practice of dedicating girls to the god, started by S.J. Kamble in 1098, had an impact that could be heard in the speeches of women even much later.

In the Mahaar community there were women priests performing certain rituals such as those required for marriages etc. The community expressed its respect for them in appropriate ways. The Mahaar community of Phansavale in Ratnagiri district had built a memorial to a woman priest named Phatiakka, also known as Bayo, after her death.

Untouchable women took up the low-cost marriage functions introduced by the Satyashodhak Samaj under the leadership of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule in the nineteenth century. Women were also agreeable to the suggestion that girls should not be married early, and that mixed-caste marriages should take place.

When Babasaheb announced his intention to change his religion in 1935, women held meetings to express support for him. The ignorant, illiterate women showed that they had the capability to understand the real obstacles to their progress when they told Babasaheb, "Don't give us a religion that gives us the veil." The untouchable community, which was largely unconscious of its rights in pre-Ambedkar times, was suddenly shaken awake. Women too began to organise conferences, they began to speak. They began to make their voices heard in meetings and conferences. They passed resolutions on subjects like the education of girls, child care, equality between men and women, violence, self-defence.

The Federation Convention of 1942 in Nagpur made women aware of their political rights. From then on women entered politics. "When we left our homes to enter the struggle it was not to turn back but to fight till the final victory."

Women wearing clean saris joined the Samata Sainik Dal courageously. They took out processions, built organisations. Platforms resounded with their stirring speeches. Later, women participated in the 1956 conversion in large numbers. They embraced Buddhism themselves and went into the villages as religious activists and organised functions to initiate the people into Buddhism.

Were there women in the Ambedkar movement? On the pages of *Bahishkrut Bhaarat, Janata, Prabuddha Bhaarat, Jaibheem* and other such newspapers we find the untouchable women activists, standing up to say, "Yes, we too were there." All these women have been born and have grown up within the same social and cultural milieu. All of them have suffered casteism, contempt and insults.

From the actual interviews of the women we learn that some of these women were born in poverty while others were relatively well off. In particular, families from the Vidarbha region are well off because of their land, farming, industrial occupations, owning houses and some education. In general, when people don't have to struggle for their daily meals, they turn to other occupations. If they have good objectives and values before them, they usually succeed in doing some good work. That is why the Ambedkar movement grew with more vigour among the untouchables of Vidarbha than among those of the Konkan. The number of women activists from Vidarbha is larger than those from other parts of Maharashtra. More than half of these women have studied at least up to the "final" (vernacular final, that is seven years of school) level. The number of teachers among them is high.

Like the men, some of the women have trained their bodies in gymnasia. Regularly doing sit-ups, becoming proficient in masculine skills like stick-wielding, wrestling, wielding swords and spears, they have attained self-reliance. In this, the name of Prabhavati Ramteke is in the forefront. She was a teacher at the

Seva Sadan, Nagpur, from 1935 to 1936. Her father was a wrestler and gymnast. He brought up Prabhavati like a son. She would move around fearlessly at all hours of the night. In 1939 Prabhavati beat up a ruffian because he molested her sister. In 1946, when there were riots in Nagpur over the Poona Pact, Prabhavati would place a dagger in the folds of her sari, keep a supply of chilli powder ready and move freely around the city, holding meetings and so on.

Many women among these were born in the families of activists. Some have entered the homes of activists after marriage, some have benefited from the presence of activists in their neighbourhood. This awoke them to the reality of the movement and gave them opportunities.

Babasaheb's speeches and thoughts have had a great impact on these women. In particular, his speeches at the time of the Mahaad satyagraha appear to have caused changes in their lives. His advice to women not to wear the kind of clothes and ornaments that would mark them as untouchables was followed by some women, who started to drape their saris differently. They took to heart his threefold mantra, "Study, organise and struggle." With their small babies on their hips and in their arms, they entered the struggle for equality, and many women served terms in prison.

The Congress Party's work for the liberation of untouchables was backed by ample funds. This was not the case with the Ambedkar movement, which depended on the support of poor and ignorant people. The untouchable woman was not far behind the men in extending this kind of help. Even though they were often completely illiterate themselves and had nothing to do with newspapers, they spared money from their wages or the small amounts they spent on paan and tobacco, to sustain newspapers like *Mooknayak, Bahishkrut Bhaarat, Janata and Prabuddha Bhaarat,* or to set up and run schools, colleges and hostels for students. They collected donations during weddings and other ceremonies.

Women also wrote for newspapers like *Janata* and *Prabuddha Bhaarat*. Through stories, articles and letters they expressed their thoughts and gave evidence of their social awareness and aesthetic

taste.

Some women composed songs and presented them at various functions in order to carry Ambedkarite thought to the masses. Even today some women who earn their living selling petty goods in trains, take Babasaheb's thoughts to the people as they travel.

Draupadi Kharat is a 60-year-old woman living in Govandi in the Mumbai suburbs. For the last thirty years she has been singing songs about Babasaheb and the movement in a ringing voice as she sells fruit in railway carriages. When she sings her attention is not on her basket. If somebody says to her, "Bai, they'll steal your guavas", she answers nonchalantly, "Let them.... My Bheem, my Baba has given me so much wealth, listen..." Then she tells everyone through songs what Baba has done for us, and what we should do.

If some women made efforts to take the movement forward in various ways, others took a different path. When their life had become a desert and they were drowning in sorrows, they emulated Kisa Gautami and Patachar, overcame their sorrow-filled lives, and donned the robes of ascetics. They shaved their heads and became bhikshunis. They set off towards nirvana.

Around 1956, about five or six women, took up the spreading of knowledge as their objective. These women started schools, hostels, and orphanages for girls. For lack of space we are giving only a glimpse of these women's lives. Janoji Khandare's granddaughter-in-law Kalavati Khandare is still running the women's hostel that the old man started in Akola. The Nagpur lawyer, Meshram, was a dedicated worker of the Ambekar movement. His wife, Tarabai Meshram, is carrying on his work by running a secondary school for girls in Nagpur. Kamaltai Gavai, wife of one-time leader of the opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, R.S. Gavai, was active in the satyagraha of the landless. She started a newspaper, *Republican Sandesh*. Today, she runs a hostel for girls. Vatsala Bansode, a teacher in Yawatmal, runs an orphanage to give shelter to orphaned and lost children in Nerparsopant, Yawatmal. She is an ideal teacher, and is also active in meetings and processions. Her children too are working for

the Ambedkar movement in their own ways.

Even after the Republican Party split into several factions, we find that women worked with dedication in all the factions and are still doing so. Raibai Pawar, living in Parel in Mumbai, was scorned by society as a widow, but since 1952 she has been active in the B.C. Kamble faction of the Republican Party, taking part in Buddhist initiation ceremonies and in election campaigns for the party.

Suman Kotangale from Nagpur suffered terrible beatings from her husband, but she continued to be active in the movement. When she went to jail during an agitation organised by the party, she was separated from her small baby and had to suffer mental and physical agony, but she went on working for the party.

Bagirathibai Davale went on an indefinate fast to demand concessions for dalits who had become Buddhists. She broke her fast after thirteen days with a sip of fruit juice. She has also established several Mahila Mandals.

In this way many women have taken the Ambedkar movement forward by struggling for their rights. We can mention the valuable contributions of Godavari Kamble (Chandrapur), Shantabai Bansi Gangurde(Mumbai), Anusuya Guhankush (Pune), Vithabai Hire (Pune), Rukmini Kotangale , Parvatibai Sontakke, Seetabai Patil, Tanubai Pathare, Pavitrabai Thokale, Seetabai Sirsat, Draupadibai Sakharkar and Dhanabai Bhatankar in this context.

We can see that a great religious transformation took place in the dalit community after the 1956 conversion. Having embraced the atheistic Buddhist faith, they gave up their Hindu idols and sacred texts. All the women say, we didn't feel any pangs while we did this. It is only the rare exception when a woman like Laxmibai Kakde of Pune says that she felt bad to cast out her gods, and that she did so from fear of boycott by the rest of the community.

In order to take part in the movement, some women underwent contraceptive surgery, some took on a co-wife, while others looked after the children of their co-wives and mothers-in-law. Many women fresh from childbirth went to jail. Some women took their babies along to jail, while some, fearing that someone

would steal their chickens while they were in jail, protected their only assets by taking the birds in baskets with them to jail! While trying to strike a balance between housework and social work, some women earned praise and others contempt. All these women activists are excellent speakers, and their language also is chaste, but in order to give the reader an idea of the regional diversity, we have written down the beginnings of some interviews in local dialect.[2]

While giving us an account of their work, the women told us only what they could remember or what they thought was worth telling.

No woman got help from men in her housework. They could go outside the home for organisational work only after they entrusted the housework and child care to some other woman in the family: mother, mother-in-law, sister, daughter. Men on the whole cannot see their wives as activists, let alone as individuals. Some women were outspoken about this.

Some women could not take part in the movement because of household responsibilities or opposition from their families. It was for such reasons that Laxmibai Pagare of Nasik, in spite of her resonant voice, oratorical skill and depth of knowledge, could not become an activist. Like her, we too feel regret about this. More than half the women interviewed told us that they gave up working in the movement after Ambedkar's death because the disunity in the community and the factionalism in the party was a great disappointment to them. Some educated women speak forcefully of the need to go to the villages and slums, take up the problems of dalits and fight for their rights, for their progress, against violence. But this does not happen. On the contrary, there is now a widening gap between the educated dalit women in the cities and the illiterate women in the villages and slums. The educated woman is caught up in the world around her and in her own progress.

When the educated woman crosses this gap and joins hands with the illiterate women from the villages, the Ambedkar movement's dream of transforming boycotted India (*Bahishkrut Bhaarat*) into enlightened India (*Prabuddha Bharat*) will truly be realised.

Endnotes

1 English in original — translator.

2 Dalit women activists even today often express themselves forcefully in rustic dialect or the speech of dalits in city slums. The authors taking care to explain that the dalit women leaders speak chastely is typical of the period when dalit women's independent organizations had not become militant, of course we have not tried to convey the flavour of different dialects in the original Marathi — translator.

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01 Beginning of the Kaala Ram Mandir satyagraha in 1930, with woman in the foreground and women at windows

02

03

02 Women felicitating Dr. Ambedkar on his becoming Law Minister, 1942

03 Dr. Ambedkar with his second wife, Maisaheb (standing)

04 Dr. Ambedkar addressing women's meeting (undated)

महाड सत्याग्रहास जाणाऱ्या लोकांस

जाहीर खबर.

ता. २५-१२-२७ पासून महाड येथें सुरू होणाऱ्या सत्याग्रहास जाणाऱ्या मंडळीस विनंतिपूर्वक कळविण्यांत येतें कीं, त्यांनीं आपल्याबरोबर ताट, तांब्या, कांबळी व तीन दिवस पुरेल इतकी भोजनाची सामुग्री जरूर आणावी. आम्ही तेथें भोजनाची व्यवस्था करणार आहोंत तरीपण प्रत्येकानें आपापली तयारी ठेवावी. **डॉ. आंबेडकर** व इतर सत्याग्रह कमिटीचें लोक मुंबईहून ता. २४-१२-२७ रोजीं आगबोटीनें निघणार आहेत. तर ज्यांना त्यांच्याबरोबर येणें असेल त्यांनी ता. १५-१२-२७ पूर्वी आपल्या जाण्यायेण्याच्या खर्चाकरितां ५ रुपये बहिष्कृत हितकारिणी सभेच्या ऑफिसांत आणून दिल्यास त्यांच्याकरितां स्वतंत्र बोटीची व्यवस्था करण्यांत येणार आहे. तरी ही सोय ज्यांना पसंत असेल त्यांनी तावतोब आपली नांवें बहिष्कृत हितकारिणी सभेच्या ऑफिसांत नोंदवावी व सेक्रेटरीकडे ५ रुपये देऊन पावती घ्यावी. व ज्यांना कमिटीच्या मंडळीबरोबर यावयाचें नसेल त्यांनी दासगांवला उतरण्याची खबरदारी घ्यावी.

महाड येथें सत्याग्रहाच्यावेळीं अलोट गर्दी होणार आहे. म्हणून त्यावेळी गर्दीमध्यें आपला मनुष्य अचुक ओळखता यावा या करितां सत्याग्रहांत भाग घेणाऱ्या स्वयंसेवकानें **बहिष्कृत हितकारिणी** सभेच्या नांवाचें पदक छातीवर लाविलें पाहिजे. ज्यांच्या छातीवर सभेच्या नांवाचें पदक नसेल त्यांच्या संरक्षणाची किंवा इतर कसल्याही प्रकारची जबाबदारी सत्याग्रह कमिटी आपल्यावर घेणार नाही. सदरहू पदकाची किंमत फक्त दोन आणे ठेवण्यांत आली आहे व ते बहिष्कृत हितकारिणी सभेच्या ऑफिसांत विकत मिळेल.

आपला,

सिताराम नामदेव शिवतरकर,

सेक्रेटरी सत्याग्रह कमिटी.

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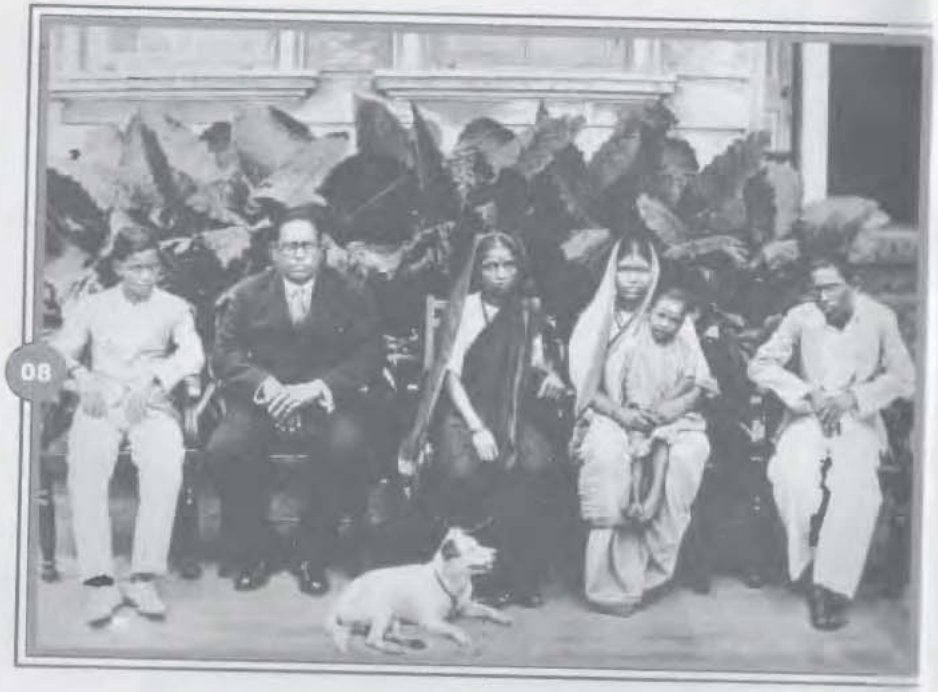
07



05 Notice of Mahaad satyagraha, 1927

06 Women at a meeting being guarded by Samata Sainik Dal (undated)

07 Women's meeting at Bombay central, (undated)

08 Family photograph of Ambedkar with his first wife Ramabai, son Yashwant and other family members

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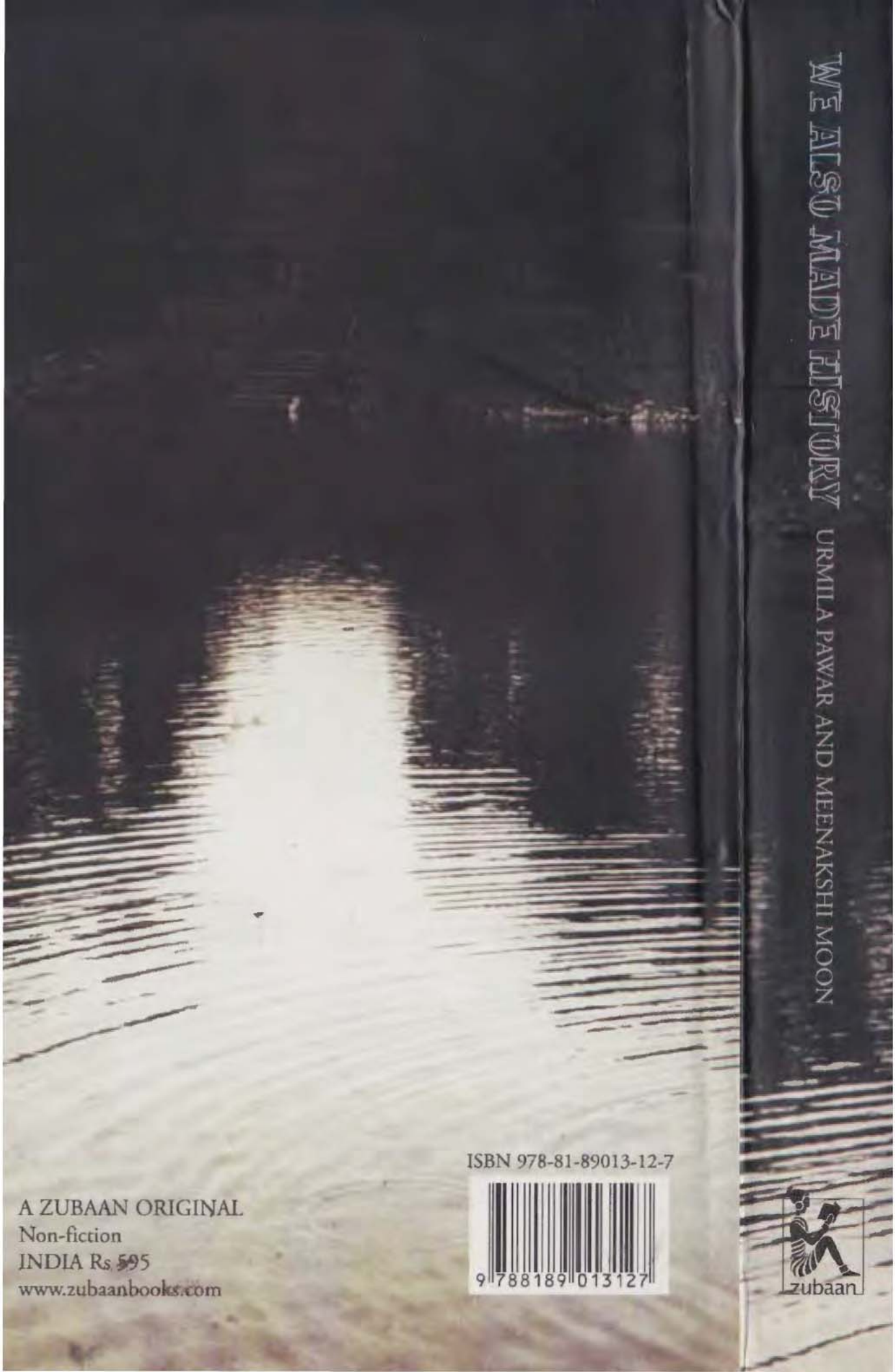
All photographs reprinted from the book Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar published by Lokvangmaya griha, Mumbai (2007), and from other archival photographs made available by the same publishers.



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